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THE BARGAIN TRUE



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She hesitated before she entered

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THE BARGAIN TRUE

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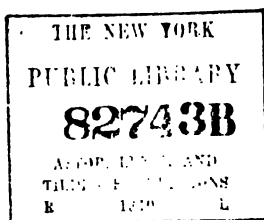


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CHAPTER I

DALE ALDIS had returned. So Glenny, ogress caretaker of World's End, unwillingly admitted to an occasional tradesman who found his way through the tall gate. Amherst regarded World's End as its most shameful attraction. Visitors were taken up the hill to look upon a many-windowed villa of faded green, with drawn shades. The padlocked gate possessed a bell, like an old-world convent, which must be rung before entrance was accomplished. As the last tinkle-tinkle died away Glenny would appear in her gray uniform of a past generation, her thin white hair strained into a fantastic little button and steel-framed glasses shielding flashing eyes. Glenny inspired awe. She possessed the characteristic snobbishness of a servant to the upper classes. Amherst possessed no upper classes. It was a well-intentioned, monotonous town with a thousand mill hands, a thousand retired farmers, a justice, a doctor, a music teacher, a soda fountain and endless stray dogs.

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For more than twenty years Glenny had stood between intruding Amherst and mysterious World's End, in which time no gossiping villager had won her heart.

There were always a number of applicants to do garden work at World's End. But Glenny stood guard during the snipping of hedges, paying the curious native from a beaded red-duck purse which she wore under her apron, and escorting him formally to the gate.

When being shown this most shameful attraction the visitors were told in a meaning whisper that World's End was like a palace inside. Once a well-meaning new divine called to ask if the gardens did not appeal to Glenny as a charming setting for the annual missionary outing. The divine never reported in detail his experience. He merely said Miss Glenny was a woman of strong convictions.

Occasionally if the visitors had children their hostess would brave ringing the bell to ask meekly of Miss Glenny if the little ones could see the cemetery!

Glenny had been known to say no and flounce away or to say yes curtly and take them on an all-too-brief tour of inspection. If they were admitted, upon entering the green gate they came into a garden of charming but

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rambling propensities. Stiff bayberry hedge surrounded it — with a sundial and a mercury ball for them to comment on, nudging each other as they passed. There were beds of old-fashioned pinks, cornflowers, yellow flags, Madonna lilies, Canterbury bells and a double row of foxglove, with a trumpet vine and a catalpa tree attracting attention to the carved bird houses.

A creek flowed through the grounds, in the center of which was a tiny island accessible by a delightful Japanese bridge. Glenny would tiptoe over this, admonishing her guests to do the same.

A green Buddha peered out to shock the orthodox, and water lilies drifted lazily where they willed. Sometimes joss would be burning, whereat the villagers would be sniffingly curious; and there was a sunken basin in which graceful goldfish swam.

The cemetery consisted of nine small stones with the carved and contrasting names of Laurel of Lightheart, Daisy J., Julius Cæsar, Dusty Traveler, Rags, Rowena and Rebecca, Hip Flitters, Helen of Troy and Spartacus! Posy-covered mounds lay before these stones, and the wondering guests would be told that Laurel of Lightheart had been Miss Boechat's terrier; Daisy J., her spaniel; Julius Cæsar,

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a parrot of intelligence worthy of a human form; Dusty Traveler, a mongrel pup of undying loyalty; Rags, a rope poodle of whom little Dale was fond; Rowena and Rebecca, haughty mocking birds; Hip Flitters, a monkey from Calcutta who met an untimely end by gormandizing on cream puffs; Helen of Troy, a greyhound; and Spartacus, a grizzly mastiff!

Then the assemblage would find themselves tiptoeing over the bridge and outside the gate, Glenny locking it with a heavy hand. Annoyed at not having penetrated the isolated verandas the hostess and guests would sit under the trees to discuss the situation, without gratitude for their personally conducted tour.

"World's End," the hostess would begin with that delighted-shocked expression, "was built for — her —"

"Her?" the guests would ask, while the children, little mediums of entrance, stood peering into chinks of the green fence.

"Mirza Boechat, French, a dancer, very beautiful and very wicked. Dear, yes — have you never heard?" Here the hostess' voice would properly lower. "She fell in love with Lord Aldis; he was twenty-five years older than she. He saw her dance in Paris and became infatuated. She was just eighteen. Of course he was a married man — so they

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went off to Florence to live. They say his wife's hair turned white that first year. He spent thousands on her, I guess — and this Glenny was her maid. He did n't tire of her, because there was n't time — he died very suddenly and she —”

Here an unintelligible whisper. The guests would give vent to shocked syllables.

“She came to America. I guess she could n't stay in England; his family would n't hear of it,” the hostess would continue in flat, rasping style. “I guess he must have left her a lot of money; I don't know how much but you can judge for yourself after seeing this place. She had this house copied after the one they lived in, and all her furniture came from Italy too. And then — Yes, it was a little girl, but she named her Dale Aldis, after the father. Bold, was n't it? If it had been a boy you would n't think so much of it — but a girl! Well, she's dead, poor thing —”

“The girl?” the guests would ask impatiently.

“She's never lived here. Her mother named this World's End and shut herself up like a prisoner. My mother remembers her walking in the garden — she always dressed in silk with shining beads round her neck. Oh, she was pretty enough, tall and dark, with big

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black satiny eyes, but as useless as a fifth wheel. I guess she was good and sorry for the way she had acted. As soon as little Dale was old enough nuns took her away. Twice a year she comes home to see her mother. My land, she's been coming home for years! The nuns always hire Dan Stewart's fly at the station and she sits between them as prim as a princess. They say she's never worn anything but handmade clothes and her hair is always in a tangle down her back. She walks between the nuns and looks neither to the right nor left — cruel, I call it. When she was away one winter — oh, this was some time ago — her mother died. They did n't send for Dale but this Glenny took the body away. They say she went clear to Italy — maybe that was what she wanted.

“Do you think this made any difference about Dale? No — home she came to see Glenny twice a year, with the two nuns with her; always in ruffled lace dresses and her brown hair hanging in a tangle of curls. Then she grew up all at once and one nun came home with her, and I suppose sometime she'll be coming home to stay. Maybe then she'll get acquainted and let folks make of her — though her mother never did; or maybe she'll sell World's End and go away.”

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"Who'd buy it?" the guests would ask scornfully.

"Nobody but a fool," the hostess would chuckle. "They say it's furnished elegant — piano, oil paintings and gold-trimmed dishes — the things he bought her."

The party would drift down the hill to the more commonplace atmosphere of rag rugs and tea and sauce to console them for their climb. But when the guests returned home and were recounting their adventures, World's End stood out like a star among stars — something about the faded villa with its deserted garden and animal cemetery was so pregnant with the tragic romance of a past generation that the guests, try as they would, could not speak harshly of its dead owner or the present one, but in a mysterious voice as if they did not quite understand.

The guests could no longer wonder as to Dale Aldis — for report had it that one nun had brought her home to stay and many trunks with the initials D. A. were being carted up the hill, while Glenny ordered lavishly from the tradesmen. The next morning a passer-by said that some one was playing an opera score at World's End and a merry laugh floated across the garden.

So the World's End girl came home to live.

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Amherst — judicial, gossiping, not unkind — waited to know what she would do with her life, since her parents with selfish abandon had started it on an extraordinary pathway. With the candor of a dowager Dale knew every detail of her mother's life and Glenny had told her every detail of her lonely death.

"Glenny," Dale began the morning she was unpacking, "you old joker, do you realize that we are to housekeep? We must have a long talk and understand each other. I'm a sociable sort of creature, Glenny. I believe I'll give a party!"

She was sitting on the floor of her dressing room, which had been her mother's. It had ivory net, curtains, eighteenth-century mirrors, old prints and dainty porcelain figurines, with the bed and chairs of Empire pattern and drapes of azure and gold. The blue tapestries which hung on the wall and likewise the canopy of gold lace had been the work of Breton women. There was a bedspread of sheerest muslin embroidered in detail, and over the foot of the low carved bed hung a blanket of Russian ermine. The village heard rumors of such but doubted its actual existence. Mirza had coaxed Dale's father to buy it in St. Petersburg one mad winter's day.

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"Miss Dale" — Glenny's eyes flashed behind the heavy glasses — "I 'ope you'll not forget yourself."

Dale held up a box of trinkets to be put in the dressing case.

"Skittles, Glenny — I'll frost the cakes, and dust!" She crossed her legs, boy fashion. Her morning frock was a glistening thing of steel tissue shining through cloudy blue draperies — the nuns had dressed their beloved child for the world with rare taste. It deepened the gray of her eyes, with their thick, curly lashes; and the mass of brown hair, which she wore in the highest possible coiffure to emphasize the fact of being "all grown up," intensified the naturally ivory-tinted complexion.

"You can't know villagers," Glenny said, returning from the dressing table.

"Why? Won't they know me?"

Glenny sat down in a chair with an abrupt gesture of disapproval.

"Miss Dale, for more than twenty years 'ave I stayed at the end of the world to do my bounden duty. I brought your lovely mother 'ere; I took you to the nuns. I took your lovely dead mother to Italy, where she could rest. I came back to watch over World's End and over you. I'll go on watching until I

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die — but I shan't open the gates to Yankee swanks."

"Glenny, dear, we must know some one." Dale looked about in bewilderment. "I'm only twenty-one, Glenny — mother would want me to know some one."

The gray eyes narrowed. "Ah, shall I write Lady Aldis?" she asked. "Don't shiver, Glenny; you know no good lady's maid is ever shocked. Just because father and mother were unsuitably matched according to the world, and because they adored each other and defied the world — and died — died like we all must die, Glenny — you and I and Lady Aldis — must I, after years in a convent, be shut up for life at World's End?" Her slim hands crushed a ribbon belt as she spoke.

"My lamb, wait until Mr. Leswing comes — meet the gentry first."

"But I'm not the gentry," Dale said steadily; "I'm a — a bolter." There was a quiver in the usually steady voice. "I think for myself — I've been thinking for myself for years. We both adored Mirza" — Dale had never called her anything else — "she was everything lovely. I never knew Lord Aldis but you said he was splendid in his own way."

"A king!" ejaculated Glenny, whose own romance had been lived in that of her mistress.

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"That may be true. But has it never occurred to you that it was a mite selfish for Mirza to run off from the world, to build a spooky villa without a hint of a nursery, and send me off to the nuns to only let me see her twice a year for two days at a time?"

"She 'ad a broken 'eart," Glenney defended. Finding fault with Mirza was nothing short of finding fault with the Creator.

"And she let mine go hungry." Then dimples crept into the firm pink mouth. "I'm not the past generation, Glenney; I'm the present and I'll have to live as such. I'm tired of living in the past. Even the nuns had been coached what to say and what not to. I was to be treated with respect but always kept away from the others. The others had fathers and mothers coming to see them; they went home summers. I was left there. When Sister Bonadventure and Sister Coletta did bring me home they told me, 'Don't make your mother nervous!' I almost dreaded the coming, and yet one gets infinitely weary of a dormitory-and-rice-pudding existence. When I saw Mirza she was always petting her dog or parrot, or the mocking birds were perched on her shoulders and she would say, 'Don't be naughty, Dale! Dear me, how tall you are, growing like a weed. Hand me my shawl!'

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"That was all." Dale let the ivory brush drop unheeded to the floor.

"My lamb, she was grieving for 'im," Glenny insisted.

"Well, why did n't she let me grieve with her? You were a nice sort, Glenny. You made me cinnamon buns and jolly things to eat. But it was Mirza you adored — I was just a necessary evil!"

"My lambkin!" Glenny was startled out of her twenty-odd years' pleasant martyrdom.

"Oh, yes I was! Mirza was grieving herself to death purposely. She made morbidity the cornerstone of World's End, and her friends were ghosts. Reality annoyed her; you can't say I'm wrong, Glenny, can you?"

Dale's face startled the old servant; it had the ardent determination of Lord Aldis — that first time he had come to see Mirza in Paris, and Glenny, nothing of white hair and spectacles about her, had served them cordials. She felt suddenly tender.

"Per'aps you're right, my lamb — but I would n't dwell on it."

"She kept reading yellowed letters over and over and crying, did n't she? She cried in the night and moaned in her sleep. Did she do that when I was n't here?"

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"Yes, my lamb. She used to say: 'Glenny, you'll not leave me, will you?' And I'd say: 'Not unless you send me off, and then I'm liable to be like the bad ha'pence — always turning up when you least expect!' She kept living over the days with 'im." Glenny's spectacles were misty. "Oh, they was the lovers! 'E adored 'er and she worshiped 'im! It was 'appiness just to see them together. They forgot everything else in the world — milord was blind to 'is duty or 'onor. 'E wanted 'er to 'ave everything she had ever dreamed of 'aving — and she 'ad it for an all-too-short time." Glenny gave way to a strangled sniff. "'E used to say to me when 'e was leaving for London just to make a faint showing among 'is own set, 'e'd say, 'Glenny, if she 'as a bad 'eadache or a nervous spell, send for me. If the cabinet is in session I can shut it up like a hopree 'at!' And 'e did — many's the time. The letters 'e wrote is all in that chest — why, my lamb would 'ave died if she 'ad n't them to keep 'er company. She'd read one a day — and dream about it — and when she'd come to the last 'e wrote 'er, the very day 'e was taken, it would seem as if she was going to slip off like a ghost. 'Glenny,' she'd say, 'I can't bear it — why did 'e 'ave to die?'"

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"Did his wife ever row?" said Dale with amusing worldliness.

"No, she was a stiffish sort — she never bothered. It 'ad never been any use when she 'ad before. She was 'is own age — and a trifle bow-legged."

"Mirza was eighteen — father was forty-three." Dale unpacked more trinkets. "Well, it is not fair that I should be sentenced to World's End. I'm very young, Glenny, and tired of dreaming. So we'll have the party and I'll frost the cakes."

"You can't ask village girls — they go along the streets with ice-cream cones. There's no gentry 'ere —"

"Who else is there to ask?"

"Wait until Mr. Leswing comes. 'E'll talk to you; 'e's your own sort."

Dale glanced at her mother's writing desk, a dainty inlaid affair with a huge blue quill pen calling attention to its purpose. An unusually large envelope with a foreign stamp was addressed to her.

"I suppose Philip Leswing will send me back to the nuns," she sighed. "Does he have all our money to handle, Glenny?"

"Every sixpence — and a gentleman 'e is — knows two kings and 'as more money than either — a favorite at the court. 'E was a

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stripling when your father was alive; 'e used to copy 'is clothes — particularly the cravats — and come to talk to your mother afternoons. I've often served 'im 'is brandy. When Lord Aldis died 'e was the one that 'elped your mother come away; she would 'ave been quite mad if 'e 'ad n't. Milord provided that 'e care for 'er money. And 'e's done it like a prince. Came from Africa to meet your mother's dead self in Florence and bury 'er where the sunset was the loveliest. Milord and she used to point it out to each other."

"I suppose I must rejoice that he is coming from Africa again." Dale walked to the window. "But I shan't consent to any cloister. I believe I'm the only real thing here except Trig." She bent to pat a grizzled terrier. "Glenny, were n't you ever extremely young and filled with bubbling happiness as a music box is with tunes? Did you never dream lovely dreams for years until you fairly ached to make them come true? I'm hungry for people, real people — I'd elope with the ice-man if he was n't already bespoken!"

"My lamb, remember — remember —"

"I'm not Lord Aldis' daughter — that sounds like a penny dreadful — I'm Dale, the World's End girl. For Mirza came to the end of her world when her lover died and

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left me. Here I am. But I'm going to find my way back to life; and pink-toed babies; and young men who are nice to walk out with; and girls who will tell me how to knit old-rose sweaters; and comfortable, middle-aged women with best rooms and recipes for jams; and men who fought in the war that I can pet while I listen to their stories — so we'll have the party."

"Ow many?" snapped Glenny. She realized in the brief interview that Dale had the determination of the dead Milord as well as his duplicated chin.

"All the young people between sixteen and twenty-four. Then I'll have an at home for the married women, and a play morning for the children, and a beefsteak dinner for the men and women. I'm going to church and sing in the choir and ask the minister to tea — and if Amherst won't play with me because I'm the World's End girl we'll lock it up, Glenny, and take Trig and go traveling, traveling, traveling — until we come to the beginning of the world. Oh, I'm glad I'm home — I'm glad!" She pushed the French curtained windows to let the sun stream in and light unexpected bronze curls in the dark head.

Glenny stood aside.

"All the money I can spend — and I'm not

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bow-legged! I'm twenty-one and I love everyone. See those roses and forget-me-nots — but I want the bleeding heart torn out to-day; we'll plant baby's breath and cosmos instead; and we'll take the padlock off the gate and leave it open — Why, there's that same boy — only he's a man! Is n't he splendid, Glenny — a giant — is n't he handsome! Don't you remember him? I do. He sent me a valentine — the only valentine I ever had — and signed it 'J. Coventry.' That was years ago. Then I waved at him one time when I was at the station. Sister Bonadventure was busy counting change. Why — he's coming in, Glenny — I'll go open the gate —"

"'E's the truck farmer!" gasped Glenny.

"He's the handsomest thing I've ever seen," she sang as she danced down the stairs.

Glenny made a last appeal. "Are you daft, Miss Dale?" she called, hoarse with indignation. After more than twenty years of preserving an atmosphere of mysterious awe was it to be shot asunder one June morning by a truck farmer?

"I'm young," came floating back to her unwilling ears. The tinkle-tinkle of the rusty bell died away. Resigned to the worst Glenny bent to pick up the frocks. Fifteen years with the nuns had not instilled in Dale the

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sense of order which they had striven to teach her.

"How many young ladies are there who have a button or a hook and eye off their garments?" the head sister would ask each morning after chapel.

Dale and perhaps two others would rise to face the scorn of the buttoned and hooked community.

"How many ladies who have two missing hooks and eyes or buttons?" the calm voice would proceed.

The two others would sink into their chairs, thankful to escape. Dale's tall self would remain standing.

"Is it possible there are any young ladies who do not know how many missing hooks and eyes or buttons?" would come buzzing round Dale's dizzy head.

Truthful but untidy Dale would remain standing.

"You may be seated, Dale Aldis," the command would finally be heard.

Grateful and quite rested from the cramp of kneeling in chapel Dale would obey.

Glenny began to look into the matter of mismatched stockings and crumpled ties. What matter if Dale did lose her head a trifle, Philip Leswing would soon be coming. He would

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set her to rights, for Leswing was gentry. Glenny's shriveled chin quivered as she placed some brushes on the dressing table. Two medallion portraits rested there: Lord Aldis, a forceful, wickedly handsome man — a trifle too dissipated, to judge from the lines under the magnetic eyes — with a crimson band across his satin waistcoat; the other was Mirza Boechat, unsuitable companion of his last years, fairylike in her gauze frock, the star eyes smiling on the world in impersonal oblivion.

The world said Lord Aldis hypnotized Mirza — for she came to depend on him for her very existence. Nothing mattered save his word. Nothing else could matter. She forgot her career, her honorable suitors, her simple but respectable family — as easily as the brown earth forgets the snow when rose time comes again. At his death she had wondered vaguely why she lived and why she had not the courage to die. Philip Leswing, quite given to violent cravats and Tennyson in those days, had been duly impressed with his part in the affair — it was something of a Bohemian honor to be intrusted with the mistress of a dead nobleman! He had quite risen to the part with amusing solicitude to help her away from everything that would

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prove unpleasant. It was drolly pathetic to him as he recalled it later. At the moment it was something which the young bounders of his set regarded as a distinction. Society petted him, débutantes became infatuated, dowagers asked him endless questions, and the club men stated between drawls that he was "comin' on."

With the experience of his forty-five fast and furiously lived years as well as with the power of his diamond mines, Glenny had no fears but that he would be able to set Dale in the pathway she could go in.

She moved the pictures a trifle forward — Dale's words kept repeating themselves, that it was not fair to have taken her to the end of the world; not caring how or when she found her way to the beginning. Glenny had long ago forgotten her own personal existence, she had yielded it to Mirza when she first dressed her for her *première* at the Opéra Comique — at seventeen, the youngest solo dancer to have received an ovation from royalty.

Dale had been merely an unwelcome consequence of the tragedy, some one to care for and have far enough off not to prove annoying. Had she been a boy things might have resulted differently. Leaning on her son's arm, an echo of the dead man she had wor-

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shipped, Mirza might have found her way back to the beginning of the world — but the girl child was a hopeless and uninteresting problem. She sent her away, since she fortunately did not have to think of money, knowing she was being properly cared for and secretly hoping she might embrace the faith and become one of the nuns. Mirza's life had been lived within that cabinet of fading letters and the pictures of the man who had made her a pitiful child dying of selfish grief. Here began and ended all of her life and all of her love — with Dale, nothing but honest gray eyes and long legs, appearing at unwelcome intervals to demand cinnamon buns.

Glenny peered out the window. There was no sign of either Dale or John. She concluded that, blood telling, Dale had taken the vegetables and sent him off. She fell to dusting the dressing case with elaborate detail.

CHAPTER II

MEANTIME Dale had romped to open the gate. "Howdy do!" she said brightly; is n't it a lovely morning?" Then she laughed nervously. It was the first time she had ever been left to a tête-à-tête on masculine lines.

John Coventry set down his basket of vegetables. "I'm awfully glad to know you." He took off his straw hat and held out a huge tanned hand.

Dale's slim fingers pressed it gently. "Please come in and sit down," she urged, "unless you're busy."

"Oh, no, not at all!" he fibbed chivalrously. "Say, Miss Aldis, you don't know how long I've really known you — do you?"

She looked up at him as she led the way to the side veranda. "How long?" she asked knowing she was blushing.

John was taller than Dale and tanned with the out-of-doors. He had a square, lantern-jawed face, with eyes like the deep sea and a black shaggy mop of hair which emphasized the deep-sea coloring. His arms were taut with muscle; it was impossible for him to

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move without pushing something out of place. When he smiled he displayed a loathed chin dimple and strong white teeth as even as Dale's. He wore corduroy trousers and a blue flannel shirt open at the throat.

"You sent me a valentine once," she could not refrain from adding.

"You never answered. I thought you were provoked." They were as direct as children, hampered by no conventional preliminaries.

"I could n't. The nuns read your letters. I've been at the convent for fifteen years."

"But every time you came home I saw you. There's a chink on the left side of the fence where I used to spy. Once I watched you go over on the island and kneel down beside the animal cemetery and cry. I was going to shin the fence to find out what was wrong, but I was afraid of Glenny."

"I wish you had. I cried a great many times, but I don't remember that particular one."

"You were lonesome, were n't you?"

Dale nodded.

"You must have been. Perhaps I ought not to talk to you like this. Glenny wanted these carrots and —"

"Oh, Glenny is n't in a hurry. Do you raise all these things?"

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"Yes; you should see my place. I've ten acres and a real log cabin."

"I adore log cabins," Dale murmured. "I don't like World's End."

"It is gloomy," John admitted; "but of course it is splendid. It was copied after a place abroad, was n't it?"

Dale nodded. "In Florence."

An awkward pause followed.

"Here's where I must go," John began.

Dale put her hand on the flannel shirt sleeve. "I want to ask you something. Could you wait another moment?"

"An hour," he said to her surprise.

"I want to give a party — yes, really I do. I don't know anyone and I don't know how to know anyone unless I do give a party. I thought it would be nice to have a garden fête with lanterns strung round — don't you?"

"Yes; only whom would you ask?"

"The young people. I want you to give me the list of names. You know everyone in Amherst, don't you?"

John laughed. "I do. Only, you see, Miss Aldis, you are different from them and they might not understand —"

"That's what Glenny said. Poor Glenny, she does miss the leisure class! But if I'm an American and going to live here I must know

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my neighbors. Sister Bonaventure used to say: 'Young ladies, when you go to house-keeping remember that you may dispense with friends but you cannot exist without neighbors!' So please give me the names and I'll send out cards. I've decided on a week from to-day. Will you come?"

"If you wish."

"Oh, I do." Dale was desperately serious. "I should n't ask if I did n't."

"Then I'll come."

"Have you anyone in particular you'd like asked?" She was a trifle unwilling to admit that he had.

"You mean girl? No — no one." His big brown hands clasped over his knee and he leaned back awkwardly in the wicker chair.

"Because if you had — why, of course I'd want to ask her," she finished with the finesse of a world coquette.

"That's mighty nice of you — but I intend to be a bachelor."

"I know I shall never marry," Dale admitted.

Both young persons instantly looked at each other with radiant smiles. It was all as fragrant as the June roses — and quite as amusing as the plans of baby robins regarding their advent into a worm-eating world.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Do you live alone?" Dale asked later. The fact of future isolation made them quite *simpático!*

The shaggy black head nodded. "Granny died last winter."

"Who cooks for you?"

"I do. I make flapjacks and do up green-currant preserve and put down sausage for the winter — you ought to see the way I run my larder."

"Is n't that beautiful? I wish I could. I can't do anything but play a little and read French and that sort of thing. I think I'll learn how to cook."

John laughed. "You could n't — it would make your head ache."

Dale bristled. "I'm not an utter doll, please!"

"Pardon — maybe I'm wrong. Only you don't know what it is like. Sometime when you're out walking come up to Orchard Lodge — that is the cabin's name. I'd be happy to show you round."

"I'll come soon for the list of names."

"All right — only if I were you I would n't bother with having a party."

"Is there any reason I should n't! Would n't you come?"

"You know I would."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

They immediately lost track of the party.

"What made you look at me when I was a little girl?"

"You were the nearest thing to an angel I could imagine," John told her soberly. "I was n't outwardly a visionary youngster. I kept the dreams well hidden. You see, my father fiddled for dances — and drank the rest of the time. My mother was one of the Cape Cod Peaseley's; she ran away from school to marry him and they never forgave her. She died when I was born, and granny, father's mother, managed somehow to bring me up. I hated the fiddling. I made up my mind when I was eight that I'd do something real in the world — something worth while. When I was twelve my father bought an old fiddle and taught me two chords in E flat. I wore his coat, to make me seem older, and we played for a dance. I got a dollar for the night — that is, he got it." A grim look replaced the smile. "I played those two chords until he died — country people don't bother about harmony. I hate a second violin now — that see-saw, see-saw; I keep seeing myself standing on a platform dressed in a man's rags. But it fired ambition and taught me self-control — that's a lot in the race.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Granny and I struck out and rented land — and we made it go. She worked like a Trojan, a good old soul, and let me go to night school and study rainy days. I did n't write to my mother's people; I'll never write them until I've made good in the big way I mean to do. You see, Miss Aldis, I don't peddle truck stuff in a cart. I come here because" — a flush crept over the tanned cheeks — "because Glenny is old and queer and she reminds me a little of granny and — it is n't any bother to drop in with a basket once in a while —"

Dale's eyes shone like stars. "What do you do with it?"

"Ship it to cities. I've a market now I can't supply. This log-cabin establishment is just an apprenticeship. In ten years I'm to be known as the String Bean Czar or the Duke of Endive." He laughed boyishly. "It's a pet theory of mine that the American farmer has always sold his birthright for a mail-order catalogue of green-plush rockers and coal-oil lamps — that kind of thing. The American farmer can and must be the same as the landed English squires. It is up to a few of us who have nothing to lose and all to win to make this come to pass. Perhaps I see in exaggerated numbers, but I plan to

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breed cattle, thousands and thousands of dollars' worth each year — and cultivate new vegetables within the means of the poor — that kind of agriculture. I want a farm — no scant, stony fifty acres with mediocre crops.

"Of course anyone can make a living on a farm — we've heard that from the day we began to lisp 'This is the way the farmer sows.' We need the old pioneer spirit of brave ideals and huge achievement, as when the schooner wagons crossed the desert and found our West. I content myself on the log-cabin estate because I'm busy planning for the future. I'd stagnate if I thought that were to be the end of ambition. We must have gentry farmers in America or we'll be done inside of a hundred years. We need —" He stopped, laughing again. "Please excuse me. I get rather carried away when I start this kind of thing. It means so much. Come and see me and I'll have your list. Now I'll go along."

"You are wonderful." Dale was not ready to dismiss him. "I've read books about self-made men like you. We used to smuggle them in at the convent. The stories always ended by their being rich and famous men with lovely wives —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I wish I could think that last," he added deftly, flushing as he spoke.

"What made you think I was an angel?" The subject was too fascinating to be let alone.

"Because you were so beautiful and always wore lacy dresses and used to empty your purse into blind Otto's cap at the station. In the winter you wore a white fur coat and cap — do you remember?"

She nodded carelessly. "I always wanted to answer that valentine, John Coventry."

"You have answered it now." He rose and shouldered his empty basket. "Good-by — and may you have a happy summer." Whistling an old jig he strode out the green gate.

Dale began to hum under her breath. She ran to the gate to fasten it open permanently by means of a rock. . . . He was so very strong and tanned . . . and his eyes like the deep sea . . . his mother had been gently born . . . the String Bean Czar. . . .

Finally she went upstairs, to find her dressing room as immaculate as if she had not descended upon it with an array of possessions. The medallion pictures of Mirza and Lord Aldis caught her attention. They seemed fascinating strangers, both intensely interesting to wonder about. She had always

THE BARGAIN TRUE

regarded them as dream persons who never really existed.

She knelt before them, the gray eyes very serious as she said slowly, "What — is love?"

It was a great joy to be in one's own house and able to speak aloud or whistle or jig on the polished floors.

"I don't believe you either one knew," she continued — while Trig curled up on the shining steel draperies and went fast asleep. "I don't believe John Coventry has ever known either. I wonder if you two would say with Glenney that he is n't gentry! Oh, Mirza dear, he's so strong and giantlike and there is n't anyone in particular that he wants asked to the party."

Then the pink lips curved into a hurt expression. "But you two don't care; you never cared for anything in the world except Florence. Poor Lady Aldis! Even if she was bow-legged, Mirza darling, she had a heart! I suppose London society whispered about you — lords and ladies, actors and poets, statesmen and vulgarly rich persons — what a lark!"

Her eyes strayed to the desk, where Leswing's letter rested. She rose, upsetting Trig, to reread it. It was headed in a dashing hand "Paradisio" — and continued:

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"DALE-GIRL,

Business says New York. Therefore I shall run up to Amherst to see you. You must be a tall, woman-Dale by now. My impression of Amherst is that its inns are wretched. Will you put myself and Humphrey up for a night? I sail next week; that will bring me to Amherst sometime in August.

PHILIP LESWING.

"P. S. I bring your dividends with me."

It was written on creamy parchment paper with an engraved crest.

"I wonder if you're half as nice as —" She broke off her reverie presently, tossing the letter aside, to spy out Glenny, who was cooking the vegetables.

"Are n't those stunning carrots?" she demanded. "He raised them — think of it! He's going to give me the list of names. Is n't that lovely? And he's coming too. It will be a week from to-day, from seven until they want to go home. Let's have chicken salad and lots of little cakes and —"

Glenny paused, copper cover in one hand. In her devotion to Mirza she had even forgone the distinction of being a lady's maid to descend into the scullery and become drudge of all things.

"You talked with 'im?" she demanded tartly. "You know 'is father was a drunken fiddler —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Oh, yes; and he's built a log cabin and I'm going to call on him in two days! Glenny, let's set the table on the porch. I know you never do, but let's begin. I like to hear the birds. Mr. Leswing will be here sometime in August, and then I'm going to buy a saddle horse and have a telephone."

Glenny did not answer.

"I was thinking that I've twice as much love in me as anyone else," Dale added as she peered into the cooking kettle of stunning carrots. "I never had a chance to exhaust any of it on Mirza or Lord Aldis — you do love your parents ordinarily; and I've never had friends or relatives, Glenny, so all that is stored away too. And the nuns say we are endowed with romantic love, besides. . . . All that love must go to some one, must n't it?"

"Let's 'ope it's of the gentry," Glenny answered curtly.

"Let's hope it is n't the dead-letter office," Dale teased.

CHAPTER III

JOHN was getting onions ready for the market when Dale arrived. She had walked from World's End. It was two miles, and not used to tramping she was tired.

Piling the washed onions on one rustic bench and the unwashed in the metal tub of water John did not notice as she turned in the pathway.

He was surprised by someone's saying: "Are you going to have any more young beets to sell?"

He sprang up, to see Dale standing beside him, dressed in her usual picture-book fashion — a white lace blouse with a shining black satin skirt and a Spanish sailor set atilt like a matador's.

"What do you know about this?" he found himself answering in confusion. "Yes, I guess you can have a mess of beets. Did you walk? I see by your slippers that you did. You're tired, are n't you? If you'll just wait a minute until I douse these last ones we'll go in and find some cold milk."

He handed her a three-legged stool. She

THE BARGAIN TRUE

sat down, suddenly shy and self-conscious and wishing she had stayed at World's End as Glennie urged, until he came peddling at her back door!

"It is very pretty here," she was finally forced to say.

"I think so. I've lots of plans for it; maybe they'll never come true. I don't know, but I think it does a fellow good to dream, don't you? Makes washing onions and digging potatoes not quite so grubby." The deep sea eyes looked at her with a frank interest.

"Of course we must have dreams. I've thrived on dreams ever since I can remember."

"You were always in that convent, were n't you?" His strong arms lifted the tub of onions easily and swung them onto a bench. Dale watched admiringly.

"Yes. You see mother was n't well and I made her nervous. It was better that I stay at school. After she died it was twice better that I stay. So I took all the courses the sisters offered, and then they asked me to become one of them. But I told them I was coming home, back to World's End and Glennie. So they bought me everything beautiful under the sun to wear — though I'm sure I don't know where I'll have any use for such clothes unless I persuade Glennie to travel

THE BARGAIN TRUE

or Mr. Leswing has some plans — and back I came. But I really feel as uninteresting as a smart clothes tree.”

“Would you close up World’s End and go away?” he asked.

“Gladly, burn it down — I’d run off as fast as ever I could! Maybe Mr. Leswing will want me to.”

“Who is Mr. Leswing?”

“The man who has our money. He’s called the South African diamond king. A wonderful person, I suppose. I’ve never seen him.”

“And is he coming?”

“For a day. He would n’t be content in Amherst any longer. Are you content in Amherst?”

“Sometimes,” he answered abstractedly. Then he said: “Don’t ever shut up World’s End — but that’s queer for me to ask, is n’t it?”

“Why?”

Both were unconscious of the onion setting or the sun’s glare. As Dale was watching strong tanned arms move easily here and there and broad shoulders and deep-sea eyes with hidden fires — she knew not of what — so John Coventry traced the blue veins in her slender throat and watched the flutterings of the pink pointed fingers. He could see just

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beyond the lace cuff to the white wrist. For years he had dreamed of taking that wrist and pushing back lacy sleeves until the bare arm lay in his strong grasp — and of kissing it until the blue veins merged into a blush with the rest of her sweet startled flesh. . . .

“Because,” he stumbled on, “that’s been my one fairy tale. All the years I fiddled chords, dressed in a man’s cast-off coat, I used to weave romances about the place. How you were an imprisoned princess and I the knight coming to rescue you, how my black charger would come dashing up the walk, my sword hacking down the foe and I’d ride off in the night with you. Is n’t it funny what kids can dream? No one would have suspected. I always thought of you dressed in your storybook things — all shining white and silvery with dark curls floating round your face. Why, I’ve lain awake winter nights and comforted myself with that story. I’ve promised myself romance when I was a man. Maybe that’s one reason I’m not walking out, as they say here, with some mill girl in cheap red finery. They said I was queer when I built my cabin and chose books for friends.”

“How old are you?” said Dale softly.

“Twenty-four. How old are you?”

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Twenty-one."

They smiled at each other.

"It is good to be young," Dale added; "and I'm very glad you dreamed about rescuing me. I only wish you had."

John stood up, his face turned from her and his strong hand pointing out the green hills. "As far as you see there, I own — clear. This side my land stops at the knot of maple trees — that horse by the fence is the Laird of McNab. That little strip off there is mine too; and all the rest is going to be some day. The cabin is n't always going to be my home, Miss Aldis. I've planned that when I make my fortune and find my dream princess" — he turned ever so slightly toward her — "right back of those oaks will be my house — a cream-colored Colonial house, because I'm a good American and I wish for nothing more elaborate. It would n't be good for me — or the dream princess. It will have Corinthian pillars and trimmings of green, and inside we'll furnish it in old mahogany and splint-bottomed chairs and soft gray carpets. I'll have a barn to match, and a pergola with honeysuckle climbing over it, and a garden — garden lovelier than even the garden at World's End. I want magnolia and Japanese cedar trees to guard the entrance. The log cabin —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

A flush covered the tanned cheeks.

"What of the cabin? That is your beginning, so you must never forsake it." Dale came to stand beside him — her dark head just reaching his chin.

"I've thought that my — my children could have it for a playhouse — Indian fort — whatever they wished," the young man told her earnestly.

"Wonderful!" Dale clasped her hands. "You're so real — you're like a sensation I used to have at the convent. I'd be asleep in the dormitory with Sister Bonaventure dozing beside me and a brewer's fat child from the West sniffing on the other side. I'd waken suddenly to feel deserted — like the little match girl in the fairy tale, the one who froze to death New Year's Eve. That awful tick-tock of the clock, Sister's snores, the fat girl's snuffles — and suddenly, from out nowhere, I'd feel a lovely glow as if strong tender hands were holding mine so I could go fast asleep! That is what you are like, Mr. Coventry — you're real; you want real things as well as success — roses looking in your windows and babies laughing out!"

"I've made you unhappy," he said whimsically; "whereas you merely came for beet greens!"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

They laughed — quite glad, each of them, for the unhappiness.

“Please show me your cabin.”

Dale picked her way across the yard. He followed, opening the door of the log house with a deferential flourish. It was a quaint dwelling. The mind of the owner was revealed in the furnishings. He had fashioned the furniture himself — roomy chairs with leather cushions; a round oak table with deep underpockets for his “nonsense”; wood carving and straw braiding; magazines; pipes; writing materials, and what not. Navajo rugs adorned the floor, and the fireplace was of uneven gray stones with an old-fashioned crane and andirons challenging the Indian pottery and copper candlesticks for supremacy. Built-in bookcases on all sides were filled to overflowing. Dale bent to catch the titles. She found Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, Eliot; sea yarns, fairy tales, philosophy, Arabian Nights, endless farm manuals — with Swinburne, Keats and Tennyson jostled shamefacedly on a lower shelf.

The small kitchen and John's bedroom just beyond completed the establishment. Skins hung drying on the rafters, and sage and tansy were likewise being made ready for the winter. A wilting bouquet of flowers was

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thrust into a too-short glass and hip boots were thrown in a careless heap beside an armchair.

"It is beautiful," Dale said simply. "But won't you let me tidy it up?"

"You?" he asked incredulously. "You've never done that sort of thing, have you?"

"But I've always wanted to — particularly a room with a pipe rack and hip boots!"

"I'll go off and let you have a clean sweep," he offered.

"Finish your onions and I'll call when it is ready."

The deep-sea eyes were serious. "It is nice of you to do this, Miss Aldis, but perhaps you ought not bother —"

"Why?" — she was all-aggrieved child.

He looked at her without speaking. Again came the boy vision of his dream princess. Again came the sensation of the warm tender hand clasping hers and she fell asleep in the vague dormitory. The deep-sea eyes and the gray shining ones looked at each other and a flicker of something neither understood yet both welcomed appeared in each alike! Dale felt that her throat was furiously flushing; she wanted to sing some strange, savage melody with a refrain, "Joyful, joyful, joyful"; she wanted to run away and hide, and never see

THE BARGAIN TRUE

John Coventry again; she wanted him to take those brown strong arms of his and lift some tremendous weight so she could glory in his strength and be ashamed for her own pale weakness; she felt aglow with impatience; stunned with the discovery of something within herself of which she had never known; baffled, delighted — and quite eager to tidy up!

“Do you want to tidy up — sure?” he said finally, the deep-sea eyes having turned to a dangerous darkness.

“If you want me to.” The absurd repetition, the almost humorous situation escaped them both. Romance shielded the cynical viewpoint. Twenty-one and twenty-four, both tall and gloriously young and unafraid, they looked at each other and debated “tidying up” as kings debate their countries’ destinies. Nothing else mattered — World’s End or the log cabin, the village girls angling for John’s heart, Leswing sailing across seas — only June and the glow in their bodies and the song in their hearts — and tidying up!

“I’ll finish my work — you call me,” John decided.

But he did not finish his work. Instead he walked round the planted land like a restless prisoner. Dreams halfway coming true are

THE BARGAIN TRUE

often terrifying. What a fool to dream — to let her come halfway patronizingly, halfway amusingly! His homemade possessions suddenly became glaring bad taste. Dale in lace and satin trying to tidy up wilted nasturtiums thrust into a tooth mug! He must never allow it to happen again.

He leaned against a fence corner to argue himself from his foolish reverie. As he did so he glanced toward the knot of oak trees, and there rose in his dreamer's mind the Colonial mansion with wisteria hanging about the portico and shining diamond-paned windows with curtains hung by a woman's tasteful hand. The barns to match came back of it, as did the stable sheds, the helps' quarters, and acres and acres of rolling fertile soil which should be his own. Children played in the cabin; their dream figures tripped in and out, waving their hands to him. On the portico of the big house, monument to his starved dreams, stood the mistress in shining white and silver — a tall, dark-haired girl with gray eyes and an ivory-tinted skin. "Dale," he found himself whispering, "we have been very happy together, have n't we, dearest —"

A patter of rain dashed aside the dreams. He tore across the field to the cabin. Dale was coming to call him. She had turned up

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her satin skirt and pinned it behind her. Her underskirt of taffeta ruffles rustled delightfully as she walked. There was a smudge across one cheek and the sailor hat was tilted beyond any respectable matador's recognition.

"It is raining!" he called out as if an army were approaching. "You'll have to stay until the worst is over."

"Will I?" She tried to bring concern into her voice. "Well, I don't mind. Tell me how you like my tidying up."

Newly picked flowers stood in graceful bouquets at proper angles. There was a magical straightening of rugs and pillows, and the curtains were tied back with cord which she had ferreted from a table pocket. The books and papers were freshly sorted and the pipe rack sadly immaculate.

"It is simply wonderful," John said as if she had painted a complete war panorama.

"Promise you'll never let it clutter so again. I've some little pictures that would look well here. I'll give you some."

"You must n't rob yourself —"

"We are too much like an antique-furniture shop at World's End. Please let me give you a hunting scene, and a sea landscape you'd love."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"We'll talk it over some other time. Now rest and I'll get the milk." He tip-toed into the kitchen, returning with a pitcher and glasses.

Dale watched the raindrops. "It may rain hours," she announced, not at all sadly.

"I'll hitch up the Laird and take you home."

She shook her head. "Don't hitch up right away. It would n't be fair to the Laird."

"I don't care what would be fair to him," John's face was a broad smile, "but if it was decent weather I know what would be fair to me — a trip to see the Panama Rocks. I bet a cookie you have n't been there. The Laird is so gone on the Rocks that he almost finds his way alone. There is a great stretch of pasture just outside."

"Panama Rocks," Dale tilted her head thoughtfully, — "no, I've never even heard of them — but let's go anyway! What are they?"

"Don't you know the great show-place of Amherst —"

"I thought it was World's End," her voice was slightly bitter.

"Next to World's End," he passed it over skillfully, "come the Panama Rocks — about

THE BARGAIN TRUE

two acres of curious rock formation left by the Flood, so they say — a glacier deposit, say others. As much as a hundred strangers a year view them! Are n't we cosmopolitan? They are five miles from here, with neither stage nor trolley to get there, and owned by a curious old chap, Hi Backus, who charges a nickel to go through — if he does n't know you! There are endless caves and paths and ups and downs and a wishing chair and the devil's bedroom, fat man's misery and a lovers' lane," strange he should have flushed as he mentioned this, "and the famous counterfeiter's cave where they worked for years without detection — that was in 1830 — it finally led to the discovering of the rocks. You see there are all sorts of stories to weave about them. I remember one time we had a picnic there and, on a bet that I could n't get lost, I went down a deep ravine and stumbled into a new cave. In it was the skeleton of an Indian, to judge from his tomahawk and arrow-heads strewn about — and further in were bits of other bones. I have n't a doubt there are many such things in the caves if it was only safe enough to look about."

"Do let's go right away," Dale's gray eyes were as large as saucers.

"Not to-day — you must be properly es-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

corted home. Besides, it is beastly over there when it rains. You see, the ravines and fissures are so deep that snow stays there most of the year and on a wet day it is apt to be gloomy. I'll compromise and take you the very first day you say and we'll have Glenny come, too, and take our lunch. It is a wonderful place to wander about and we don't want to hurry. I suppose I've been there dozens and dozens of times. . . . I have sat in the wishing chair and walked down the lanes —"

"Really?" said Dale with dangerous coolness. "And who was with you when you found the very nicest spots?"

"No one," he said, reassuringly; "another time I went up to the highest point of the rocks — and took the Nelson girls. It just happened so — we found a nest of horned owls and they nearly fainted. They thought they were snakes — but it is too cold there for snakes," he added reassuringly, "so don't give it a thought."

"I'm not the sort that faints," Dale informed him gravely.

"No, I did n't think you were. Tell me, when shall we go?"

"To-morrow," she decided impulsively.

"Market day, but I could hurry and —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"No, that is n't right — let's say the day after."

"Splendid! Now will you please let me take you home?"

"Right away?" she pouted attractively. "I wish you would tell me some more stories — and places to go. It is such fun getting acquainted before my party."

"You're having a runaway lark."

"I'm having a beautiful time. Do you realize that I have never been of the world — or anyone's world?"

"That's true," he said softly.

"Did you get my list?"

"Yes, but if I were you I should n't give the party right away."

"But I'm starved to know people — why wait?"

"You see Amherst is a narrow little place," he began forcibly, "and you are like an orchid dropped into a row of hollyhocks. The young people might think you were trying to patronize them. You know — landed proprietors giving jam feasts, and so on."

"How idiotic! I'm an American — only I've been left at the end of the world and I must find my way back."

"Do you know," John interrupted, "I think — they — were pretty selfish."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"So do I — but the poor dears were in love and could n't help themselves. You can't, I suppose." Here was another fascinating subject.

"Yes, you can — you can love some one better than yourself. That is what those people forgot. It was n't fair to leave you at the end of the world."

"Do you think I can find my way back?"

"I hope so."

Dale rested her elbows on the table. "If you loved anyone, would you stop to think before you told them?"

"I'd make myself — if I suffered eternal tortures. I would not marry any girl unless I knew I could make her happy."

"But supposing if you did not marry her she was certain to be miserable?"

"Then I'd — I'd make her decide which of the two vast evils." He smiled tenderly.

"Please give me the list and then drive me home," she commanded with sudden caprice.

"You really insist?"

She nodded.

He reached into a table pocket to find a pad. "Here you are — forty names — is that enough?"

"Quite." Dale took the list and began reading. "Is this Olive or Alice Austin?"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Olive — a splendid girl. She helps me house-clean sometimes. Olive is the nicest girl I know."

The pink lips were set in a firm line. "How nice," she said coldly. "I do hope she comes — it will be so much more pleasant for you."

John smiled. "You'll find Harvey Nelson's name farther along; they are to be married this fall. Olive would n't come unless he did."

Dale flushed, conscious of her betrayal. "You're amused with me," she protested like an embarrassed child.

"No — amused with myself."

"Why?"

"Because I never thought I could make dreams come halfway true."

"And have you?" The list was forgotten in favor of still another exquisite topic.

"I'll tell you later. Just now duty says to pilot you home before Glenny accuses me of kidnaping."

He wrapped an old mackintosh about her, lingering an instant longer than was necessary in so doing, and helped her into the covered trap. They jogged through the warm shower, humming snatches of songs, drawing the Laird to a halt to have some deserted farmhouse explained or to point out the beauty of the hills. The sun came smiling at them before World's End was reached.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Dale caught sight of Glenny at the gate.

"I went to see Mr. Coventry," she explained, "and he brought me home."

"Goodbye," she added, turning to give John her hand, "don't forget — the day after to-morrow unless it simply *pours* rain — and then you better come over and tell me if you think it is too horrid to attempt going," she was unconscious of her own absurdity. "I've had a wonderful time — thanks to you and the Laird."

He held her hand a trifle longer than the "polite etiquette for all occasions" demands. "I won't forget — the day after to-morrow. And if it is pouring rain I am to come over and see how much it is running off your eaves-trough!"

She stood waving at him as he drove off.

"Well," said Glenny grimly, "and what 'ave you to say?"

"Tra-la-la, I've a 'date' — like other girls," sang this cherished creature, with abandoned slang. "Glenny-duck, I'm going to Panama Rocks the day after to-morrow, and you're coming, too — and we'll stay all day and have a jolly time — ta-ta-ta —" she began doing a little dance step on the porch, "roast a chicken for us, Glenny — and we'll walk down the lane — lovers' lane — and sit in the wishing chair — tra-la-la — ta-ta —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"If I 'ad n't nursed you myself," said Glenny coldly, "I'd be won over to the hopinion that you'd fallen on your 'ead in your infancy!"

"Tra-la-la — ta-ta-," sang Dale, "a log cabin is the most adorable place in the world, Glenny — if the right sort of person owns it. . . . I've my list of names for my party . . . and a date . . . a date . . . and I'm just like any other girl . . . ta-ta —"

Divided between loyalty to the dead and a desire to book passage for Liverpool, Glenny went to making hot lemonade despite the sun, muttering to herself that her lamb was rapidly acquiring the characteristics of the black sheep!

CHAPTER IV

THE "day after to-morrow" dawned with a fleecy sky tinged with pink and not the most remote hint of a storm-cloud. There was simply no gainsaying the fact that it was an ideal day. Glenny, martyred to the last heartbeat, but loyal, as well, stood on the side porch with a bulging luncheon basket, her steel bow glasses seeming unusually severe and unapproachable, while Dale in a tender blue frock, with a white lace hat for a proper shade, waited for the sound of the Laird's hoofs.

She had not long to wait. She was not the only person in Amherst who had risen anxiously almost before dawn to scan the sky.

With his harness shining like silver, the Laird came rushing around the corner — as much as the Laird could be persuaded to rush — John driving him at a spanking gait and sitting triumphantly in a hired trap, if you please, one with high red wheels and a delectable yellow enamelled body!

"What ho!" called John easily, as he drew up before World's End.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Is n't it a wonderful day?" began Dale, wondering why on earth she was blushing and Glenny persistently frowning, as if it were a hearse which confronted her instead of a jolly little trap.

John-Giant had come to take charge of the luncheon basket. Glenny set it stiffly on the ground rather than hand it over personally. He smiled as he noted the fact, and his deep-sea eyes and Dale's gray ones exchanged a greeting peculiarly their own.

"Well, are we all set?" he asked, helping Dale into the seat beside him. "Don't tell me I have n't done myself proud — one can of brass polish, the best rig Amherst could produce — and utter neglect of the onion bed."

Dale leaned back among the little cushions — moth-eaten to the prosaic observer — moss-like to Dale's romantic, tempestuous little self. She felt she was beginning to live!

"Oh, it is wonderful," she said and then paused — she had used the same adjective before; she must seem a stupid marionette to this very unusual young giant who dressed neither like a smug, mail-order countryman nor in the height of town fashion. There was something picturesque about him — his hair was just a trifle longer than is customary, and the linen suit a trifle quaint, and his soft,

THE BARGAIN TRUE

black silk tie in its Byronic knot the "most adorable thing ever." His strong, tanned hands, betraying toil, were clean and well kept — yet not manicured with a sickening polish, and he had a fascinating little arts and crafts ring of beaten silver on his little finger which betrayed good taste — another chap in like position would have selected a bulging, "re-constructed ruby" worthy of a street-car conductor or an iceman.

She was noting these things as they jolted along, Glenny in a perfectly unapproachable and freezing silence and Dale tucking in her frilly skirts under the absurd patchwork robe and re-adjusting the lace hat to suit the summer breeze.

This John-Giant person had very unusual eyes, she decided for the tenth time, more unusual than to call them merely "deep-sea" — they were shielded by long, almost girlish lashes, and when he smiled the lines about them "crinkled," always a favorite happening with Dale. She fancied if he were ever very angry, he could set the blue-black chin into a stubborn pose and make his lips a thin, hard line, while the eyes would change into things of a passionate, dark color and the crinkles be creases of violent determination! . . . She wondered how many girls he had taken to

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Panama Rocks in a high-wheeled, yellow-bodied cart . . . she wondered how many times he had neglected the sacred rites of weeding the onion bed and had donned a fresh-looking linen suit with a soft black tie and had sallied forth to point out the beauties of the countryside. . . .

"Everything all right?" he was asking her shyly.

"Oh, very," her tone was a trifle stilted — because of what she was thinking.

John looked sideways at her. He, also, had been indulging in a reverie of a most personal nature. They would have been surprised, these two young people, had they been able to understand each the other's trend of thought — quite as surprised as if someone gave someone a Christmas present in return for one, and, upon opening, each found the identical object!

John had been noting the dusky waviness of her hair and the fact that the white lace hat was no ordinary creation such as the village girls wore — he recalled their buying ten-cent frames and making crochet stuff out of cotton to cover them — and he realized that Dale's lace was of an exquisite, silky texture and that it was quite the right sort of thing to be permitted intimacy with such lovely hair . . .

THE BARGAIN TRUE

and if, in the course of time, things would change greatly for her and she would come back into the channel of normal living. His strong hands clutched the reins, causing the Laird to snort in protest. The Laird did not comprehend that John-Giant was expressing his displeasure at the way life was arranged for Dale. His face showed a flash of contempt as he recalled the persons, no matter how beautiful and charming they might have been, who thought only of themselves, sacrificing all for the moment and thereby losing all for eternity!

“Prude” John had been named by some of the young people who delighted in sickish movies and novels in which blondined young ladies were pursued unto the very last paragraph! John had called such things rubbish and had taken his Shakespeare and lesser favorites to spend long, golden hours in the woods of an autumn day.

There was something of the truth in the remark which had been passed about John Coventry — that he was an “antique” — differing from the present day generation. He possessed the early ideals of a gentleman, combined with the modern instinct for work and efficient progress. To John’s mind — as stubbornly masculine as a mind could be —

THE BARGAIN TRUE

there were three sorts of females — gentle women, women — and fools. A gentle woman was one to be protected and cared for in all senses of the word, someone who was to never know the rough ways of the universe — or even understand there were such! She must still wear silk dresses and do pretty, useless bits of fancy work — and work in her garden of flowers. She would read her Bible and believe it without questioning and her books of poetry and stay within the gates of her home. A woman was one obliged to toil and thereby often become shabby of person and weary of heart, a comrade to the man with whom her lot was cast, yet losing none of the rugged virtues — and all the rest of the unclassified females were fools!

He wondered if Dale knew how beautiful she was and who would be the first presuming one to tell her so . . . again the tightening of the reins . . . of course she had a world of curiosity and sympathy about her, very bad assets, he decided with a shake of his head . . . of course she was the most beautiful, most wonderful little bruised person that —

“Glenny-duck, are you all right?” Dale felt she must break the silence.

“I’ll ’ave rheumatism — there’s a wind blowing on me ’ead.”

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Shucks — we ought to have had a covered buggy," apologized John.

"Oh, no, Glenny won't have rheumatism — she can use some ointment," Dale dismissed the matter easily. "Just see how Trig runs along beside the Laird — they are very friendly, are n't they?"

"Are *you* all right?" persisted John shyly.

"Oh, very — and so anxious to see the rocks."

"There's a lot of climbing to be done — can you manage it? But, then, I can lift you over any bad places — if you don't mind."

She looked up at him. "You are really strong enough to lift a great girl like me, are n't you? I would like to be strong like that. . . ."

"Would you?" little triphammer pulses began in his forehead. He reminded himself that he must not let himself go on caring — caring for a dream was different, as harmless as a valentine — but caring for a flesh-and-blood person, a World's End Girl — no — *no* — NO!

"There is excellent land here," he said carelessly. "I intend to buy it and start a cranberry patch; it is just swampy enough to be useless in many ways and fruity for that. Have you ever seen a cranberry patch?"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I hate cranberries," said Dale sharply, annoyed at the turn in the conversation; "have you ever seen any grand opera?"

"Not yet — I am saving that for the time when I own my big white house."

"How far are we from the rocks?"

"Just over that curve and then they begin rising out of the fields. We won't be five minutes more —" he twisted around to confront Glenny's glaring eyes. "Are you up to climbing?"

"Strike me pink if I climb an inch," she said with a snarl.

Dale smiled. "Too bad," she fibbed sweetly; "you'll have to sit in the shade and watch that Trig does n't eat our lunch. We'll come back and find you. How long will it take — Mr. Coventry," she swayed close to him as they rounded the curve.

"As — as long as we dare make it take," he whispered.

"Oh, here we are," Dale cried a moment later. "Is n't it beautiful!" She stood up in the trap and looked about, John busy rescuing her little silk parasol.

Glenny gave way to a groan. "As if we 'ad to come into the wilderness any more," she wailed; "Miss Dale, you'll not go climbing those rocks — and breaking your neck afore

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Mr. Leswing comes — what would I say to 'im — if it should 'appen?"

"Say that I died more happily than if I merely tumbled off the bridge at World's End," Dale blew her a little kiss, "and now, Trig, be a nice sort of chap and watch that Glenny does n't fall asleep and robbers take our lunch — we shall be terribly hungry." John-Giant was tying the Laird so he could nibble at will. "Goodbye, Glenny-duck — everything is going to be splendid," and she floated across the green meadow in the direction of a little house with a sign printed in tipsy capitals:

"Panama Rox — five cent admissen! NO HUNTING ALOUD HEAR!

HI BACKUS, owner."

John was knocking at the door. An old man with a thin, peaked face and side-whiskers answered.

"Hullo, Hi, we want to see the rocks," John told him holding out two nickels.

The old man put a palsied hand over his sunken, dulling eyes. "By heck, if it ain't John Coventry," he said in a delighted voice, "well, my son, how goes it —"

"Splendid — here, Hi, you take this money or I'll have a mad on — not another word —

THE BARGAIN TRUE

go on — take it — and don't grow reckless! We want to stay all day at the rocks — do you mind?"

The old man had turned to look at Dale. "Now you're a stranger," he began in accusing, childish fashion.

"She is Miss Aldis — Dale Aldis," John hesitated preceptibly; "she lives at World's End, you know," he was confused at the old man's gaucherie.

"Mr. Backus is an old settler," he added, hoping the matter would pass over, "he likes to know just who visits the rocks —"

"Oh-ho, the girl from World's End — neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring," the old man cackled noisily, "well, have a care, John Coventry, they do say such as them are dangerous — have a care, boy — have a care —"

Dale jerked her arm away from John's — she did not seem to notice the childish old man standing in the doorway to cackle over his bad joke.

"Please, I'll go back," she said, with a quick indrawing of her breath; "it was foolish of me — to try to be one of you!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," John was marching her bravely towards the rickety old gate. "He is like a child — see the spell-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

ing of that sign — Dale, as well notice an infant's remarks — he says and does rude things to everyone — why, he has to me — lots of times — Dale, please —" he bent over her tenderly.

Glenny, sitting under a tree pretending to read her story paper, peered over the top in grieved surprise. The old man stood shading his eyes and watching the young people.

"Who'd have thought it," he mumbled, "well — they're a good-looking couple — no matter who she is —" and then he turned and went into the house, jingling the nickels together with childish satisfaction.

"You see his grandfather discovered these rocks — I told you about the counterfeiters being traced here — well, his reward was this land — and then Hi's father lived here and here Hi is, and when he dies the state is going to buy the place for a public park. It could be wonderful — only the old man has never put a penny's worth of improvements on it. He will only charge five cents admission and that is his only income — so you see he must be queer — and why bother about what he said. . . . Was n't that sign funny? Everyone thinks it is so funny they never tell him . . . here — here we begin to really see the rocks — look there, that is Gibraltar — that

THE BARGAIN TRUE

one — and the Plymouth Rocks they have named that group — I don't know why — there is Cinderella's slippers — is n't that a joke — and see how the moss grows — look out, Dale — here's a bad spot and I'll carry you over."

Before she could protest he swept her into his arms as easily as if she were a wicker teabasket, and she was set down across the sharp divide and told to peer below three hundred feet into a wonderful moss-covered picnic ground with great, gleaming rocks jagged and smooth and semi-carved, it would seem, which rose from the mossy fields at every angle. There were labyrinths and mazes and dark, ominous openings to caves everywhere, and other wide caves most tempting to look upon but only accessible to the birds. The sky was almost hidden because of interwoven oak trees which made a green canopy for them and shielded off the summer sun. 'Way below was a white sparkle — the last of the winter's snow — and as far as one could see on either side were cliffs with natural stone steps — things of perilous descent save to the romantic or venturesome. These led down, down, down into nowhere, it would seem.

"But I want to wait a moment," she protested, readjusting the crushed collar. "I

THE BARGAIN TRUE

can't bear to have him speak as he did — it hurts — terribly. Besides I sha'n't have any-one blame them — do you understand? Yesterday you blamed them. But you must never do so again. . . . They were quite helpless, the poor dears."

John smiled. "I don't think you know what you are trying to explain away," he answered with a wisdom beyond his years. "It is because you are such a loyal little person and you don't realize of what you've been cheated. You will some day — and then you'll comprehend the world's attitude."

The rocks were forgotten. "I will never understand," she said wistfully, "because people will always keep barring me out — and if I go away, far away and try to find the beginning of the world, I shall have to lie. That I cannot do. I am incurably honest, Mr. Coventry — it is inconvenient at times," a faint smile replaced the seriousness; "but when one is so inflicted it is bound to be paramount. I should always blunder into the truth, no matter how I intended to tell a falsehood. . . . I am telling you the very immodest truth now when I say I cannot blame my parents."

"If they had only married," John was thinking aloud.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Dale stamped her tiny, slippered foot. "Stupid!" she insisted; "and what then?"

"Everything — marriage is marriage. It would have changed it all. You can't understand, Dale — but I can. People can't go and smash up big laws without paying the price, and when they don't pay they leave a helpless and lovely child and she has the task. Also, she has to find her way back to the beginning of the world. It is as if your father and mother kept borrowing money at enormous interest and never bothering their heads as to the paying off of the principal — and you are left with the mortgage to be met! Do you see what I'm driving at? I tell you they were selfish and shallow and thought only of their own pleasure — it is always wrong to think of oneself first in vital issues — and to be romantic beyond the pale of conventionality is moral suicide. That is what I believe and that's what's to pay."

"You mean," she began fiercely, her gray eyes like a stormy sea, "you dare to mean —"

"I mean this," he took her hand gently, "there are just two ways of doing things, and I don't believe anyone will ever discover any more — right ways and wrong ways — black and white. And when you try to mix them up and make the world agree with you — you

THE BARGAIN TRUE

succeed in making a murky, drabbed, gray state of affairs for those left to bear the consequence. Everyone is rather horrified, really, when someone goes and smashes up laws. They may say they would not be, and pose as broad-minded and all that — but just the same if it comes home they are anything but liberal — and I am sure I don't know why they should be. If they were where would we be inside of a hundred years — a maelstrom of selfish indulgence and a consequent race of idiots! No, we must not do the things we want to do unless they are right. That is what makes me bleed for you — because you are lovely — and sweet," he added impulsively, "and it is unfair to have left you at the end of the world — when they could have done the decent thing."

"I don't quite see —" she insisted faintly.

"All right; listen to this — if you had a child, would you want to leave that child circumstanced as you are? Would you?"

The gray eyes closed briefly. "Oh, no . . . it is hideous," and tears rolled from under the thick lashes. "It is just that they were poor dears who —"

"I'm a nice sort to bring you out for a holiday and make you cry," he said, hating himself violently. "I'm ever so sorry — please for-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

give me and let's go see the rocks and have the jolliest time we can. Don't bother about what I've said."

She was looking at him with a womanly, strange expression. "I shall not bother about it, in a way," she answered, "but I must thank you. No one else was brave enough or cared enough to try to make me understand. It hurts to understand some things — I suppose that is good for our souls! And a person is a coward if she is afraid to understand. . . . I believe I see a little of what you mean — you with a wretched father or this or that person with a terrible tragedy of the past are not left at the end of the world — you are keeping step with the present generation, no matter how 'tattered and torn' you may be — because your parents — were married," she hung her head, ashamed as only undeveloped youth can feel shame — with all life as a barrier to further understanding. "Oh, no, I could never let my little children have to feel so — I should want them to feel — to feel that my husband and I stopped, even in the very great happiness of our first life together, to — to plant oaks for our grandchildren — that sort of spirit, you see. . . . All Mirza had was withered, blackish gardenias, pressed between books — they crackled if one touched them

THE BARGAIN TRUE

. . . she used to cry when it happened. Oh," she paused, bewildered, "how terrible it is — I can't plan ahead — I cannot look back — or share the present. . . . And they did n't bother to think, they just did n't bother. I did n't call her mother — just Mirza — but she never minded. She loved the birds and dogs better — I can't plan for anything — at least," she tossed her head with characteristic defiance, "until Philip Leswing comes."

"Can you forgive me?" he urged, his argument seemed utterly banal — compared with the June day and the moss-covered rocks and Dale's lovely little self. He felt himself a bumptious prig.

"Of course," but she spoke impersonally. "Let me see — you said this was rock of ages — yes, it is lovely — that rock ought to be called old Doctor Syntax, like the one Glenney tells about at Land's End," she paused, conscious she was saying ominous sounding titles.

"It means such a lot to talk to you," interrupted John suddenly.

"Really? After what you said?" the inevitable coquette, wilfully misunderstanding, was beginning to waken.

"Why — you're worlds better than I — I ought to come along on all fours," he laughed

THE BARGAIN TRUE

boyishly and the sound seemed to dissipate the little fog of morbidity these two children had developed about their holiday. Still, if youth is never morbid nor restless it is most unpromising — but neither of them realized the fact as yet!

"You've told the same thing to other persons, have n't you? All the persons you have brought here?"

"I've never taken just one person here," he answered, leading her down the first flight of stone steps and holding her hands tightly.

"Have n't you — really?" she seemed strangely pleased with the aspect of the nearest rock to judge from her smiles. She, too, forgot their argument.

"No, indeed — it has always been our crowd of youngsters — everyone with everyone — here, you must see this — it is the devil's bedroom — be careful, don't go in very far — it grows dangerous." Together they peered into the dark entrance of the cave.

"Ugh — scary — show me something nice."

"Here is the Bridal Bower — they had a wedding here once — really-freak idea, was n't it? It was Hi's mother. She stood right there — and they say it is a charmed spot."

Dale edged toward it. "What does it do to you?" she demanded.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"You wish and it is sure to come true. You stand there and wish and then I will."

She moved inside the little room and paused at the spot he designated. "There — now it is your turn."

John obeyed.

"Let's tell our wishes," she coaxed.

"Then they would n't come true," he was blushing violently — even in the dim light it was apparent.

"Oh, I know — you prayed the potato bugs would all perish; show me some more things."

"I'll carry you through here."

"No, no, I can walk —"

"But you must be carried; it is lovers' lane and that is why it is so named — it is terribly steep and rocky and you have to go through here to find the little shrine."

"Oh, I see," Dale let herself be lifted and carried slowly through the narrow trail. It seemed good to have strong arms hold one tenderly and to see how very deep-sea blue the eyes were when you were in someone's arms looking up at them — very close — you could appreciate the beauty of the deep-sea coloring far better.

"Here we are — is n't this a natural shrine? — they have held services here years ago," he took off his hat as he entered.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

It was a narrow room with a crude yet undeniable stone altar rising out of the rock and a mammoth and jagged cross above it of the same mineral. It sparkled a trifle as the sun came in to caress it briefly. All about were half-formed pews of stone and prayer-desks, as if some great sculptor had started to carve an actual chapel out of the rock and been thwarted half way before completion.

From her training, Dale knelt quickly before the altar. John stepped back to watch her. Her face seemed like old ivory in the dim light, the great lace hat drooping over dusky hair.

"It is wonderful," she whispered as she rose.

"Do you believe in shrines?" he asked.

"Oh, yes — and miracles. One cannot help it. Even though they are not of the faith. . . . I prayed the same wish here that I made at the wishing spot," she added, unconscious of irreverence.

"Did you, Dale?" he said, softly. "I wondered — as you knelt."

They passed out into the daylight to view the other things. There was Cleopatra's Boudoir and Salome's Sun-parlor and various retreats with flowery names — and a great flat space of rock with a natural crystal spring

THE BARGAIN TRUE

in the centre at which they stooped to drink, making cups from oak leaves and laughing as the water splashed them. Then they sat on a ledge of a great rock — no one knew how old it was — probably hoary with age at the time the Christ was born — and talked of many things — of John-Giant's future as the Duke of Endive and very briefly of Dale's future and of the past — John-Giant's past and nothing of Dale's, and of the present — John-Giant's present and not Dale's, and of various topics such as electricity and fox-trotting, religion and fancy ice-skating, logic and the profits in brussels sprouts, tainted money and vivisection, vaccination and moving pictures, Egyptology and fudge recipes, astronomy, calisthenics — and whether or not long engagements were a mistake! These young people promptly, and correctly, disposed of these subjects, using them all, great and small, merely as a medium of communication between their very young and loyal hearts which were learning to beat in unison!

They had just decided as to socialism and why tears were a woman's best weapon, when John said, "You must be tired — we'd better turn back and do the rest this afternoon. But right here is the famous wishing-chair — we must stop a second," and he helped her climb

THE BARGAIN TRUE

a cliff to a rock chair, with a great, gnarled back and two abortive front legs, the rest melting into the sides of the cliff.

She sat, her eyes closed and the lacy hat on her lap, the dusky hair gently stirring in the breeze. "I've wished," she said presently, jumping up."

He took his place and she stood below to gaze up in admiration.

"I've committed myself," he said happily, leaping down beside her.

"Good! Now we must come back — I wonder if the wishes do come true — I wished two things each time —"

"Oh, no fair," he teased; "don't you know the old theory that if you are too greedy you'll get naught from the god o' luck? You must only wish one and the same thing. Dale, you'll have to tell me one of the wishes — the one that means the lesser to you — and thereby revoke it by speaking it to mortal ears. Then your other wish has a fighting chance." He was laughing.

But she took it seriously. "Really? Then — if I must — because I do believe in such things — I'll tell. I'll tell you the one that means the less — shall I? And the other will surely stand a chance?"

"Proceed," he made a courtly bow.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Well — the lesser wish was — was to find my way back to the beginning of the world," she said slowly, blushing furiously — and he knew that the dearer wish had been linked with his own name!

"Hal-l-o-o-o—" they started guiltily at the sound.

A terrier's sharp bark roused them.

"That is Trig —" said Dale excitedly.

"Hal-l-o-o —" came again in a shrill treble.

"Hallo yourself," answered John.

Then Hi Backus' old face peered over the ledge of the rock above and, upon seeing them, his toothless mouth began to cackle.

"That there woman is afrettin' off her head off — as mad as a owl, you two been gone all day —"

"All day?" they exclaimed.

At which John pulled out his watch and then burst out laughing. "Well — rather! I don't blame Glenny, I admit — it is a quarter to four."

And later, when Dale tried consoling Glenny she was merely answered with a curt quoting of the old Turkish proverb, "'An Englishman will burn a bed — to kill a flea,' — wait for Mr. Leswing."

CHAPTER V

THE young people refused World's End party invitations. Avenging the scorn shown their parents by Glenny they decided in favor of a church affair which fell unluckily on the same night.

Curiosity urged a few to attend, and others would have gone because John Coventry had declared he was going, and that it was nothing short of splendid of Miss Aldis; but the majority argued them out of the resolve with wily hints of being patronized — so John, of all the forty guests, climbed the hill to World's End at nine o'clock of a rare June night.

Dressed since half-past six in cornflower chiffon embroidered with sparkling stones Dale had wandered through the rooms to see that everything was as she planned. Finally she sat at the piano to pick out aimless tunes in order to still the insistent tick-tock of the mantel clock. She made a pretty picture as she played in the old-fashioned room which bespoke past and idle days. Soft blue carpets and fussy gold furniture with crystal-weighted lamps and candles and velvet drapes were in profusion. Rugs of leopard skin were

THE BARGAIN TRUE

spread about, and soft silk cushions and a Chesterfield sofa with a cabinet of porcelains told of the days when Mirza, in all her radiant, reckless youth, had first shopped for the villa in Florence!

Half-past seven brought an end to Dale's concert. She stole to look down the hill road. No one was in sight. She tripped over the bridge to the animal cemetery to see whether the lanterns were burning properly. It was a quarter of eight before the thought presented itself that Amherst would refuse to come, their way of telling her that as her mother had wished none of them so they returned the compliment.

Eight o'clock found Dale in the drawing-room, rumpling her frock and wondering whether she could have dated the white-and-gold cards incorrectly. Half-past eight — with a smothered sob she fled to the kitchen, to find Glenny reading a London weekly with apparent unconcern.

"No one has come, Glenny," she murmured like an injured child.

"Thanks be!" sang Glenny shrilly.

"Glenny, don't you think they will come?"

"I've 'oped against 'ope —"

"I was positive about one person —"

"I 'ope 'e won't bring a basket of carrots."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Glenny glanced at the serving table heaped with refreshments.

"It's been a great deal of work for you, has n't it?" Dale's lips quivered in spite of attempted nonchalance.

Glenny spied out the quiver. "I don't mind the work if I've the right sort to work for," she answered, her eyes very kind; "bût not mill 'ands."

"Glenny, don't you think they want to know me?"

"I never think about swanks," snapped Glenny. "Neither did your father and mother. They lived in their own sphere and nothing jogged them from it."

"Death did."

"I'm speaking of their life," said Glenny, tartly.

"I was sure of one person's coming," repeated Dale.

"A truck farmer!" Glenny laid down her paper with studied deliberation. "My lamb, if your father 'ad so much as set eyes on 'im, 'e 'd 'ave found 'imself in a mill pond before e 'ad time to explain."

Someone was rapping at the front door. Regardless of Glenny, Dale turned and fled.

It was John in his best clothes — not so becoming or comfortable as his working togs.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I'm mighty late — are you eating supper?" he asked.

Dale did not answer. She led the way to the drawing-room and asked him to sit down.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Coventry," she said, standing beside her piano, a tall, proud creature in a sparkling blue frock, "that I asked for the list. You were quite right — it was a sad mistake. I shall never bother you or Amherst again. Don't let me keep you from your friends. Good evening." She bit her lips to stop their trembling.

"You mean no one has come — no one?"

She shook her head. The tall proudness left her — she was a girl, sobbing because she was lonely and hurt of heart and no one had come to her party.

"I'm awfully sorry — but I was afraid of it."

"Why did n't you tell me?" she demanded.

"I did — don't you remember?"

She hung her head. Two tears dropped onto her hand. John watched them in hopeless despair.

"Please don't cry," he finally begged; "let's go outdoors and talk. You fixed up everything, did n't you — all the flowers and your pretty dress. It's a damned shame!" he finished honestly. "But don't you care.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

They were n't good enough to come. Let's go over on the island and talk and pretend we're the entire party — we can have just as good a time. I was glad to come. I counted the minutes until I could — I made myself stay away until late because I did n't want you to think I was so anxious." His confessions were decidedly comforting.

"I've hung lanterns on the whole island," Dale said dully. "I worked for two days, and so did Glennie — we were going to have salad and ice and thin bread-and-butter sandwiches cut star shape and little cakes — you don't know what lovely little cakes Glennie can bake. And here's Trig — see his blue bow."

"Come on, Trig, old boy, we'll celebrate anyway. Never you mind. Those kids don't know what they do want." He had slipped his arm through hers, and with Trig as pilot they were crossing the little bridge.

Sitting beside Laurel of Lighthouse's and Helen of Troy's graves, with Trig settling himself at the foot of Julius Cæsar's last abode, Dale waited for further comforting.

"I would n't let them know I cared," John ran on in his comfortable growl — "the light-brained bunch!"

"I do care. It hurts. I suppose I should

THE BARGAIN TRUE

have asked the minister's wife. I never can get away from the end of the world. But I did n't think young people were ever cruel."

"Dale, don't cry — please —"

Without warning she flung herself across the tiny grave, sobbing like a child. John bent to gather her in his arms. "Dearest," he began; then he recalled himself.

Dale struggled away. "They won't like you or buy your carrots," she added scornfully, "when they know you came."

"A lot I care, a lot they can hurt my trade! I tell you they are narrow-minded people, who don't understand — that's all."

Dale became aware that he was holding her hands, and the echo of the word "dearest" floated back with a most comforting sound.

"I'm glad you came," she said slowly.

"So am I. Don't worry about me — just let me come sometimes, will you?"

The Japanese lanterns swung in the breeze and cast lovely shadow lights on the young people and the dusty terrier. Dale's frock became a set black and her blue-veined throat rose out of it like a lily.

"Yes," was all she said, but it satisfied the questioner.

"Maybe I ought not to come, you're so different."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

She gave a sharp cry. "Are you going to say that too? Tell me I'm gentry," she added viciously — "bolter gentry! Tell me to wait and see what Mr. Leswing says, that I'm set apart, that I must stay prisoner at World's End. Well, I won't—I'll run off! I'm young—I'll make people come to my parties!" She caught her breath as if she were going to cry again.

"I'll come if you like—only don't you see what I'm driving at? But you don't! Here we are—two young people yet totally different—"

"The nuns said the law of contrast—" began Dale.

"A wonderful law, God bless it!" John laughed happily. "But it must be carefully gone over by the two parties concerned. I had time to dream when I was fiddling, but I had to get down to realities when I sold onions. So I know both sides. I know this small-town atmosphere, Dale; you don't. I've speculated and read about such people as your father and mother. A gulf separates them from such as I. I'm a truck farmer, young and flushed with dreams—but a truck farmer. You're a well-educated rich girl belonging to the upper class. You are vastly different. You don't realize yet, but if you

THE BARGAIN TRUE

had to work as Glenny works, and wear plain things and — Oh, bother! Here we are — what did that dress cost?" He pointed a strong brown finger at the filmy chiffon.

"I don't remember — about a hundred dollars."

"You bet it did — and those shoes and stockings to match?"

"Eighteen."

"Um. And that thing in your hair?"

"Ten," said Dale meekly, amazed at his sudden force.

"And that's the way you've got to be dressed or you would n't be Dale Aldis. And a hundred and twenty-eight dollars does n't spring so easily from the soil. Do you know what it means to make clear a hundred and twenty-eight dollars? I do — I've sweated for it. And that's the way I'd want any girl I loved to be dressed, and be cared for correspondingly. I don't want to marry a girl and drag her down to the drudgery of a farmer's wife. Dale, you don't know how women work in the country. They have the men's work and their own as well, quite often. Think of it — the meals, the housework, the washing and ironing, preserving, helping in the field if a hand is sick, the weeding, light chores they call it — and they too often have

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to wash the buggy or help with cattle. Then children come and they have n't extra help — or pretty things to dress them in.

"I know. Some of the best fellows I know, who honestly love their wives, expect them to work until the day they die. They start in fresh-faced girls with a little store of new ribbons and fixings; and year after year they grow pale and drawn and sharp tempered, with calico dresses and made-over bonnets, and drive to country fairs to stare like gawks and hang upon a missionary meeting as a brilliant festival. No one intended this when it began — it just happened. The very fact of farm life ordinarily makes it so. It is the harshest taskmaster in the world, for you can't lock your desk and say: 'Nothing to do till to-morrow.' It is work, work, work — you give of your very blood to the soil — and your wife's youth; and your children run off as soon as they dare and make for the city."

He paused suddenly and began to whistle.

"Well — you need n't be a farmer," suggested Dale.

"But I love it — it is in my blood. I'm one of those who should till the soil. Things grow for me. Do you remember my vision of being a true American country gentleman? Dale, no knight of old intrusted with a mis-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

sion ever felt its charge more sacred than I. It sounds rather cheap when you begin to express it in superlatives. But sometime you shall see what I mean — to make culture and a hand cultivator synonymous. Oh, I must succeed! I will succeed! But it is n't fair to ask you to share the years of grubbing before success comes. If you were a little more attuned with the world you would understand. You think a log cabin splendid — to tidy up! You funny, lovely girl, don't you know that tidying up is n't anything at all? And — and don't you understand that I can't keep coming here to see you and letting myself care when I've no right as yet —" He dug his boot heel into the ground to emphasize to himself what a bally fool he was in danger of becoming.

"But suppose I ask you to come?" she urged.

"Then I'll come and learn to care and — of course if you want me to come, Dale, I will. But I've no right — yet."

"You've as much right as any man," Dale told him swiftly; "you are young and brave and sincere, and any man who is that may attempt to win whatever he wills."

"Do you think so?" He stopped digging at the soil.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I know so!" she assured him with worldly wisdom.

"I should never have let myself dream — there's the rub. Knowledge is an annoying thing, Dale; it taps you on the shoulder just when you are drifting along at a beautiful pace —"

She was silent.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked curiously.

"That it is very hard not to love people when you want to love them."

He took her hand. "Dale, I'm no presuming rustic. Just a man o' dreams with a hoe keeping him fast on earth. I've dreamed of you for years. You kept my boyhood fragrant — you'll never know just what that meant. This old house; this little island with its dead pets; your mother — a sort of magic princess, too; the whispers about you whenever you came home with the nuns and were whisked away before we had time to be sure you were truly here. And now you're a lovely young woman and I've sense enough to know it. Dale, do you know why I peddled stuff like a banana vender to World's End and shipped all the rest to the city? You've guessed, have n't you? But you want to hear me say it. It was because it was

THE BARGAIN TRUE

the only way I could come to World's End, the nearest to knowing my dream princess — a silly habit, I suppose. Dale, I'm not afraid of the ultimate future — I'll make it all come true — as true as the end of a fairy tale. But it is the midchannel that I feel is n't fair to ask you to cross with me. That is the only reason I have n't played Balkan pirate with you long ago."

"You're trying your best to discourage me."

"Then you do like me?"

She nodded.

"I'm sorry-glad. You can't see the gulf as yet — but wait — until this Leswing comes. Dale, look at my hands — broken nails — uncared for. I don't wear these best clothes well. I'm at home in my corduroys and flannels. I'd rather wait until I can order from as good a tailor as any city man than send for the eternal mail-order suits of sleazy serge."

"I don't care about clothes," she insisted.

"Yes, you do! In calico you would be infinitely dreary."

"Suppose you loved me until you forgot everything else?"

"I'm so near the brink of it I'm dizzy," he answered; "I'm fighting against it — but I'm afraid I'm a traitor in my own ranks."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

After you left the cabin you seemed to have glorified it. All my dreams and ambitions have had you as the inspiration. I've often steadied myself by saying you were to be the sleeping princess — sleeping until success did come and I could wake you."

He buried his shaggy black head in his hands. Dale came close beside him, kneeling in the grass.

"Look at me, John-Giant," she whispered. "You must n't wish that. Don't you know that makes me a slacker? It's part of youth's penalty that it must work and struggle. We young things have so much to make up for that — let the old have smug, wrinkled success. Look at me, John-Giant!"

"Well?" He was almost sullen, as if he charged her with trying to force upon him the tragedy of an unequal love.

"I'm not afraid of your midchannels. I love you — I believe in you. Won't you help me back from World's End?"

He pushed her aside. "You don't understand — I'm afraid neither one of us ought to be trusted."

"It is June," she said steadily, "and I am twenty-one. I am quite sure I love you."

"Remember, I am the first man you have ever known — wait —"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"You are the last man I shall ever love. I will not wait!"

"Let's not decide to-night — let us each think hard, Dale — and then make ourselves talk it out. We must not hurry, because" — his strong face quivered — "if you do make me love you like I want — I'd fight like hell until you were mine — mine — mine! Do you understand now?"

Dale put slim cool hands on his cheeks. "I'll —" she began.

A prosaic snore stopped them. Turning they spied Glenny sitting with the stone of Hip Flitters as a backer, her cap on one side and spectacles marathoning down a pudgy nose. Chaperoning to the last ditch Glenny slept at her post — and only Glenny knew how much she had heard.

Mischievously they tiptoed off the island.

"Won't she row when she wakens and finds we've fled?" Dale suggested. "Let me give you a van load of little cakes to take home."

"No," he protested; "just let me come again for them. Say when, Dale."

"Why, to-morrow!" she answered, quite aggrieved. "I thought you understood. John-Giant, this has been the most wonderful party in the whole world!"

CHAPTER VI

GLENNY'S remarks about wasted food lasted long after the little cakes had been consumed. But to Dale they were like annoying mosquito nips during an ideal sylvan expedition.

"I'm so happy, John-Giant," she told her lover, "that if Glennny did n't keep barking I'd float right up, up, up to the clouds — and above them. I must have something to keep me fast on the earth. You see it would never do to have it all perfect."

John smiled. "What does she say because I come to World's End?"

Glenny had kept out of the way like an unpleasant shadow. Ever since she wakened at two G. H., according to Dale, to find the candles burnt to the sockets and imminent danger of fire Glennny had had nothing to say regarding the episode.

"She does n't say — she sniffs! Dear old Glennny, she can't get used to the new generation. Mirza and Lord Aldis brought her up in the way of exciting European intrigue with dazzling beauty and jewels and gay parties and intense snobbishness, and Glennny

THE BARGAIN TRUE.

thinks that she cannot depart from it. She wants to surround me with a romantic halo, a sort of divine being to be kept from the world until some of the gentry come driving by. We can't understand Glenny, I suppose. She was the Countess of Spencer's maid before she was Mirza's."

They were walking through the garden on a misty June night. John paused beside a little summer-house.

"Wait a minute, Dale! I want to talk to you."

She sat on an old settle, to look up at him with the unsophisticated love of twenty-one in her great gray eyes. Her organdie frock, with its army of tucks and a blue sash, seemed to emphasize her tall willowyness.

"How handsome you are," she told him simply. "Oh, John-Giant, your chin is a joy forever!"

He laughed, sitting beside her. "Dale, we've only known each other a few weeks, have n't we?" he began soberly, trying not to let his hand touch the slim arm temptingly near.

"No — years and years! I was your fairy princess."

"But as the world knows it?" The lantern jaw was in a harsh line.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"If you must be horrid — yes."

"This fellow, Leswing, will land here pretty soon, won't he?"

"I suppose," Dale's fingers touched his sleeve. "John, you must be tired. Were you working all day spraying nasty bug-bugs?"

"Yes. Now, Dale, listen! I have n't the right to come here and play engaged as you suggested."

"Why?"

"Because I love you too much," he told her softly.

Dale threw her arms up to clasp her brown head. The yellow moon dipped down to bless them. Birds called a good night to their mates and the breeze wafted the scent of old-fashioned pinks across the fading rose garden.

"Skittles!" she said, to his surprise.

"I wish it were — but we must think. I take things seriously, Dale — too seriously for my own good."

"I suppose Amherst has laughed at you, has n't it — says I'm flirting; and a lot of cheap small talk?"

"That does n't matter," he evaded. "I never depended on Amherst for my opinions. They may jeer all they wish — the crops grow just the same."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"It is n't true, either!"

"You don't think so?"

"I tell you I know!" she retorted.

"Dale, there's caste in America, the same as there is in the old world. Not the caste of brains alone — that is universal. Any coolie who is clever at algebra can find a countess to boost for him. But the caste of justice is what I mean. Everyone who tries to be a good American tries to live up to it. Don't you see how unfair it would be to you and —"

"To you," she finished.

"Yes." It seemed a relief that he had told her. "I can't marry you, Dale."

Her pale face with its frame of dusky sweet hair was close to his.

"Because you are Dale Aldis, a beautiful, carefully reared girl, who knows nothing of Amherst and its ways — or of drudgery, no matter what love might inspire it. You would be dependent on me for society, and no two persons ought to be dependent solely on each other — it is deadly after a time. I've thought about it day and night since I first saw you this summer. I've fought with myself not to love you — but I do. I'd cut off my right hand before I'd let you engage yourself to a farmer. Sweetheart, I'm not good enough, I've tried to live above the customary

THE BARGAIN TRUE

environment. Plans may materialize and they may not. If they don't I can manage if I'm alone. I could n't bear to see your dreams wither. I'm in no position to marry you ever."

"What do you think I'll do with my money — throw it away?"

"I hope so."

Dale stood up in her excitement. "You mean because Mirza and —"

"That has nothing to do with you — I mean with the real soul of you. I never think of it any more than I hope you ever remember my father as a drunken fiddler. But the money seems a sop for silence ever after. I don't like it. I'd rather never see you again than to touch a single copper. If I ever marry I'll buy my wife's clothes and pay her way — every single nickel of it. You would be separating us forever if you even urged anything else. Give it back — to his wife or children or whoever there is. You've no need of it. But there, I've no right to tell you."

"That money might not have separated us, might it?" Dale said, sitting down again. "I would have had to work and I should n't have had beautiful frocks and a useless education. You would n't have been afraid to ask." Her voice broke.

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John turned; his strong arm touched her shoulder. "Don't you think I'm right?" he whispered. "Dale, I'm trying so hard to make myself be fair. It is better to stop now than to rush on into disillusionment."

"Then what shall I do?" she demanded. "To whom can I go? And where? Even if you leave me at the end of the world — I hate the money!" She buried her head in her arms. "I hate the money, I hate it!" he heard her sob under her breath.

"I've done it clumsily," he said, more to himself; "it is like tearing lace to make you cry. Dale, forgive me!"

She raised her head to look at him. Little lines had crept round her eyes. For an instant she seemed all woman.

"Don't leave me at World's End!" she whispered. "Let me work with you; let us work together to make dreams come true, John-Giant!"

"You're so young, Dale."

"So are you." She laid her head on his shoulder. Oddly, it seemed a modest gesture.

"You've never seen the world — your world. Perhaps you don't know your own mind. I told you before I was afraid to let myself care as hard as I wanted because I'd fight for you if I ever did."

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"I want you to fight — for — me," she murmured like a drowsy child.

She looked up, her lips were close to his, and the brown hair lay in a trembling heap on his coat sleeve. He bent his shaggy head down; the deep-sea eyes were dark, mad things, but the moon veiled their expression. Dale winced as his young, joyous arms reached to gather her close. Young lips met young lips and the dream of a brief, ecstatic second was made reality.

Then Dale, smoothing the crumpled blue ribbons, stood back, aghast.

"Now will you fight — for me?" she asked.

"I'll go to hell unless you marry me," he said; and he laughed — a sharp, short sound of triumphant madness. "You are mine, Dale!"

"Then I've left the end of the world," she said. "John, do you think mobcaps are nice things to wear? Of course Glenny will go to London and start a shop; you know the sort — bell on the door and living rooms in red plush in the rear. She'll have Mirza's and Lord Aldis' pictures enlarged and hung in the parlor, and mine will be in the back of the album in the attic! But we were talking of mobcaps — I think I shall certainly wear them."

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"Dale, Dale!" He had forgotten the details of everyday life; ecstasy momentarily clutched him. He kept smoothing her hair away from her forehead with a tender, trembling hand; it grew in charming little curves, he discovered — bays of surprise he called them, kissing each one.

"It is proper to kiss each other, is n't it?" Dale asked.

He did not answer.

"Things can be so comfy, don't you see? There's a woman in the village that Glenney gets to clean; she wants to pay for a stone for her husband's grave and she's anxious for work. She can wash and do the heavy cleaning and we can —"

The black head dropped onto her slim shoulder. "Dale," he said in a muffled tone.

"You're crying!" She raised his head between her hands. "John-Giant, what is wrong?"

"Nothing; but when a boy has dreamed for years of some one and made himself fancy that some one was as aloof as the angels — and when that some one comes and offers herself and tries to be plucky and talk of mob-caps — and when you're a grubby farmer and you want to be a king and lead her to a throne — and — and she kisses you — and it's mid-

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summer — something strangled that has ached for a long time in your throat suddenly blooms into a sob, Dale, and you cry — you cry — that's the best reason I know."

"Do I mean so much to you, John-Giant?" She was still all woman.

"Everything in this world — and the next?"

"Then kiss me again — and let's go on talking mobcaps," she demanded.

Amherst was not officially told of the engagement. But it needed no telling to make it supercilious toward John and entirely angry at Dale. To steal the best eligible from their girls was something they could not forgive. Amherst had looked with pride upon John Coventry as a self-made man. They delighted in recalling his father's shiftlessness and how by degrees the lad had extricated himself from the atmosphere of wretched fiddling, worse whiskey and rags stuffed in broken windowpanes!

They pointed out John's log cabin and his flourishing garden with the same pride that they did the new fire house. Before Dale's return to World's End John had been a leader in his way, unconscious of his influence. The girls openly played for his attention, the boys

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respected his opinions. They said he read books in French and could tell why the rocks over at Panama were surely a glacier deposit. He had sung in the choir — though his theology was suspected of being unsound — and had gone fishing the same afternoon, calling in the evening on one of half a dozen village belles — thus making himself popular in all directions.

But since Dale Aldis' trunks had been carted up to World's End and her absurd invitations issued and refused John had been lost to the village. Report soon had it that Dale spent an entire rainy afternoon in his cabin, he was seen taking her home; also that he went to her party instead of the church sociable, and that he called the following evening and every evening thereafter. Dale even came down to get an ice-cream soda, squired by John — a fact which soon crowded the ice-cream parlor beyond its capacity. It was noted that Sundays he took her driving, with Glenny in the back seat of the hired, stylish trap, holding a tea basket of luncheon and as grimly wretched as an idol suddenly removed from its shrine and sentenced to adorn a flip-pant den.

Amherst put one and one together and made two — John Coventry and Dale Aldis.

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After six weeks of this procedure — when John-Giant sang at his work and sent out of town for neckties and new clothes, was seen carving a desk set from cedar knuckles and tying huge bouquets of garden blossoms in lace napkins — Amherst said that Dale Aldis was doing what might be expected, fooling a country boy and breaking his heart. The village made preparations for first aid to the injured regarding John's affections. They said it was but a matter of time before Dale would tire of World's End and a country bumpkin and would close up the place as magically as she had appeared. Then John would come to his senses and return to choir singing and Sunday-night philandering with an eye to settling down and asking the best cook among the younger set to wear his ring.

John was unaware of the preparations. He knew that Amherst bowed coldly, but something about his personality forbade pertinent questions. He had planned with Dale to wait until Leswing came, unless he was an utter myth; then she could return the money and they could sell World's End, planning for their marriage.

Olive Austin was the only one who really gave John-Giant her frank opinion. Olive's position was a trifle different from the disap-

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pointed, disapproving young things of Amherst. Engaged herself to a farmer, a sensible, evenly tempered girl, as unimaginative and as loyal as a soldier, Olive had grieved about John-Giant as an older sister might have done.

So she said to him when they chanced to meet at the post office, "Walk down a ways with me — I want to tell you something."

Rather suspecting what the "something" might be and almost amused regarding it, John consented. He was so tremendously happy that nothing mattered unless it came directly from Dale.

"Are you going to marry Miss Aldis?" she began bluntly. She used the same direct, quiet method which she employed when house-cleaning or making one of her unfashionable but useful dresses. The secrets of the heart roused in Olive no finer method of investigation. It was her way — she could not have done differently with her own fiancé, a clumsy farmer lad. They had never known the rosy deliciousness of romance.

John-Giant knew this and he gave quick thanks that she had not attempted to take Dale to task!

"Yes, Olive, and I think I am tremendously fortunate — don't you?"

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"No, I'm sorry," the girl continued blandly; "you see, this Miss Aldis is —" she looked across the street as her voice paused meaningly.

John-Giant could have screamed with impatience. He felt he could not bear to hear the thing discussed. It, too, had become sacred to him — part of the wonderful romance.

"That is no one's affair," he began stiffly.

"I think it is," she looked back at him — as utterly stupid and as inoffensive as a cow, he concluded, with her round, moon face, the dull hair strained behind her ears and her green-checked gingham frock sagging at the back and leaving the front of the skirt to betray the sensible, black shoes. Her stout arms were filled with homely bundles. "You belong to us, John — we think a lot of you — and we can't help knowing how foolish it would be. Ma said to not talk to you and so did Harvey — but I never could think more of a brother than I do of you — and so I've got to say my mind. I hope you won't be mad," her voice sounded flat and unendurable. He kept visualizing Dale in a filmy lace thing, her dusky hair faintly fragrant with rosewater.

"There really is n't any need, Olive — I wish you would n't . . . Miss Aldis and I understand each other perfectly —"

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"You mean you think so! So does she think so — but you don't, either one of you," Olive grasped her packages more firmly as she trudged along — completely out of step. "She is different. Why, John Coventry, she can't work or cook or sew — and how is that going to be managed — unless you take her money? No man can work unless he eats — and you can't eat baker stuff and tinned fish for very long. . . . I think you were both in a hurry," she finished placidly, "and Ma and everyone thinks so, too. She was young and just back from that school with nobody to talk to and you were out there in your cabin and you never had a steady girl and —"

"Well, why were n't any of you decent enough to go to her party?" demanded John-Giant hotly. "She tried to be one of you and it was what I call mighty narrow on your part. I never thought you would have stayed away, Olive — you know I gave her the list of names."

"We did n't really think you meant to go — we thought you were playing a joke on us . . . that World's End has been closed for so long . . . and her mother queer . . . well, we thought *she* was. Of course, if it were now that she was to give a party we would go — because of you."

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"She won't give one, I assure you."

"And that is very foolish, too," Olive answered, in the same thin monotone. John-Giant began to pity Harvey Nelson, even if Olive had taken county fair prizes for quilting and cake-making. "We are not the richest or wisest people in the world — but we are not the worst. And we would n't hold anything that happened — you know — against her. Of course if you marry her, I shall come and make a visit — and I'll bring a present, too. Has she many towels?"

John-Giant groaned. "Heavens, I don't know — she does n't know about such things — don't you see? — she's — she's different," he began fighting for Dale's being different as strongly as he had tried to fight against Dale!

"Cross-stitched towels are nice — for company — I have n't learned how to do the crochet initials yet. I'll make her two cross-stitched ones, Ma will make two and maybe Cousin Lily will — she always liked you, John. Six are a plenty of fine ones — I only have six. I wonder if she'll live in the cabin or at World's End —"

And John-Giant found himself wishing that he and Dale could "magic-carpet it" off to Arabia!

"We are planning to live at the cabin," he

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said shortly, "and I'm sure Dale will be very happy to have you call."

Olive shook her head. "I'm going down this way," she said, pausing; "well, I certainly wish you both happiness — but I'm sorry. It is n't as it should be — somehow — we always thought you would stay with us."

"Why that is what I intend — so does Dale — great Scott, Olive, can't two people marry to please themselves?"

"Of course — if they are both sure they are really doing so!" and she disappeared down the shady walk.

John-Giant did not tell Dale of the incident. He merely said Olive had mentioned the fact of their engagement and was going to make Dale some guest towels — he believed — and while she, Olive, might seem a stupid sort, she was salt of the earth and he was sure they could be friends in time — while all the time he talked the unsuitability of Dale and Amherst kept occurring to him — as unsuitable as framing an exquisite little French print in a ten-cent frame — and expecting it to look its best!

But Dale kissed him, oblivious to such thoughts, and said she had "oodles of towels" and never bothered her head about such things — Glenny always saw to it — and they

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forgot the world and all therein save themselves!

Dale had told Glenny. "I'm so happy, Glenny, I've enough to spare if you feel lacking in joy."

Glenny had come into her dressing room just as she was going to bed. Dale, a lovely bundle of flesh-colored draperies, was lounging on the couch on which Mirza used to lie days at a time.

"I'm sorry you don't approve, but you don't know how wonderful he is," she continued.

"Keep your pity to curl your hair with," snapped Glenny.

Then she gave vent to a series of sniffs, sitting on the edge of a chair and wiping her spectacles with her apron's rim.

"Glenny, are n't you glad? Would n't you have been glad if Mirza and Lord Aldis had married?"

"Even queens in 'istory 'as 'ad their little moments," sniffed Glenny. "Why lug in the fact they never 'ad a meet at the haltar?"

"I don't, dearie. It is just to find out if you don't think it sensible to be married. You would n't advise my living with John-Giant, would you?"

Glenny started to faint, recovering as she

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reached the back of the chair. "I always planned you'd marry brilliant," she said; "it was the only thing that kep' me from my brother 'Arry these last ten year. The only kick against the pricks I could look forward to — but a farmer — a Yankee!"

"Oh, Glenny, don't go to Harry! Stay with us, please; you tie my sash so beautifully!" Dale had loosened her hair; it hung in a soft mass round her face.

"Whatever will you do — bake and sweep and —"

Glenny rocked herself to and fro.

"I shall return the money to Lady Aldis," she added.

Glenny stopped rocking. "Mr. Leswing will put you right."

"I had to ask Mr. Coventry to marry me," continued Dale in maddening candor, "but he was quite willing. I shall not give back my piano or Trig or my last trunk of frocks. She could n't make use of them. The piano will be wonderful for winter evenings. We intend to build a sun parlor at the side and raise the roof —"

Glenny began brushing the soft hair. "If your mother 'ad lived she'd 'ave never let it come to this."

A bitter smile crossed the pink lips. "I'd

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have still been at the convent, the proper and romantic ending — a nun. I do not intend to be a nun, Glenny, but Mrs. John Coventry, of Amherst. Does n't that last sound ever so much nicer?"

"It sounds like an order for the Lord Executioner," said Glenny with a last brutal brush.

John had avoided an encounter with Glenny. He knew the pleasant words she had in store for him and he mistrusted the shortness of his own replies. Besides, there was no sense in getting Glenny upset and weepy to Dale. But coming into the house one evening he was met with an unusually cordial smile directed in his own pathway.

"How are we this evening?" he asked.

"Quite roffy," she answered. "I've been extra engaged — cleaning the guest room. Mr. Leswing arrives to-morrow." And her wrinkled lips formed a triumphant smile.

Dale danced out to meet him. "Mr. Leswing comes to-morrow," she repeated; "it means we shall not have long to wait!"

Glenny smiled unseen. "If I 'ave n't lost my memory," she informed no one in particular, "John C. will be waiting till the trumpet calls!"

CHAPTER VII

A TRIFLE nervous, Dale waited until the touring car shed its passengers. First, a correct English manservant, the very sight of whom warmed Glenny's heart to the cockles, superintended the transfer of bags, hatboxes, small trunks and a case of walking sticks. He stalked up the garden with a resigned air as if he expected to see Indians or American novelists hiding among the shrubbery.

"Humphrey," he said, introducing himself to the curtsyng Glenny. Then he glanced at Dale with bored interest. "Master will be in directly. Which way?"

Glenny bustled ahead. Dale stood alone, to watch Philip Leswing, unwillingly dragged from his African lair by dint of business and rather curiously "bounding on," as he called it, to Amherst to see this child of a long-forgotten scandal.

Dale's first impression shattered her previous fancies of the grave but kindly business man of aging tendencies. Leswing had said the truth when he declared at his London club: "I shall never grow old — I shall grace-

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fully cease to be young." And he had proceeded accordingly.

In his ultra-blue traveling suit, immaculate as if he were to lunch with the queen, his low-set derby atilt over the rakish grizzled head and the handsome hazel eyes smiling at her, Leswing presented the picture for any dream hero. There was a saber cut across his left cheek which added to the effect; so did the baked, African complexion and the finely modeled sensitive lips, which could sneer as easily as they smiled. Despite his name of the Diamond King, he wore but one jewel — his flapping silk gloves betrayed it on his little finger — a ring of palest gold with an impish stone that seemed an actual demon of magic. He called it the Cobra, and the ladies of Africa asserted nervously that it gave him supernatural powers of attraction, particularly when ricksha riding in the moonlight!

His walking-stick swished the flowers with characteristic lack of consideration — the direct opposite of John-Giant, who painstakingly sidestepped a stray runner of a strawberry bed. His polished boots tripped on with a jaunty tread, and as he neared Dale he waved his stick at her, smiling alluringly.

Glenny, peering from the upper window, hungry for Leswing's greeting, told herself

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that the handsome boy, Philip, whom dowagers petted and débutantes fought for, had taken on a different guise. He was the same Philip — careless, generous, recklessly headstrong and dangerously sentimental, lackluster regarding the grubbiness of life, mad for the poetry of existence — but he had become satiated with life and its joys and embarrassments, mirthless from its flat jokes and saddened from the unexpected tragedies. He was merely looking on — smiling faintly at all he saw, believing nothing and caring for less.

“‘E’s a man grown,” said Glenny, unconscious of the humor, “and ‘e’s suffered ‘is bit — God bless ‘im!”

She began clattering down the stairs while Humphrey, striving to readjust himself, began laying out proper dinner rig.

“You are quite as lovely as Mirza,” Leswing was saying easily as he came up the steps. “Well, mystery repeats itself. My dear, I’m late reaching here but I stopped in Paris. You know all women go to Paris when they die — but the men before. Kiss me, there’s a nice creature. Ah, Glenny, don’t go to crying, I’ve arranged a smashing affair between yourself and Humphrey. Humphrey is a widower, Glenny. Does n’t that strike

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you as quite tizzy? You good old soldier, how have you been?" He patted her on the shoulder.

Dale was silent. She followed him into the house and as he entered he seemed to possess it unto the uttermost corner. He threw his hat and cane on the nearest chair. Glenny idolatrously picked them up. He drew off his silk gloves, the Cobra smiling at Dale.

"Are you tired?" she asked stiltedly. He seemed from another planet, a being set apart from her, totally fascinating and delightful, but different. She felt too tall, and her hair poorly done and her nails in need of polish.

"Not any more than usual. May I have a brandy? Ah, Glenny, you did n't forget! I suppose this is forbidden fruit for you, Dalekins?" He poured the liquor deftly.

"I don't drink — things," Dale heard herself saying.

Leswing glanced round the room. "Poor old boy and girl," he was saying more to himself. He went to the lacquered cabinet and pulled open a drawer with an authoritative air. Dale stood aside while Glenny followed him. Glenny and Leswing, bizarre charmer of another world, were looking over embers to find some last spark with which to fire memory.

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"Here's the program for the costume dance at Frascati — remember? Gad, I have n't thought of it in years. Mizra went as the ice queen and Aldis rigged himself up as a king devil just for contrast."

"You were Sir Walter Raleigh," reminded Glenny ardently; "I sewed the sequins on your doublet."

"So you did — I remember I molted all the way to the supper hall." He closed the drawer abruptly. "And what has Dale done with herself? Come, let me really see this Dale Aldis!"

She stood so the sunset shone on her face. Glenny had chosen her frock wisely — it was smoke-colored chiffon with silver and great cart wheels of pale blue beads.

"Aldis' chin," murmured Leswing looking through a gold-rimmed monocle; "a stubborn little devil at times. His eyes, too; and Mirza's grace; your hair quite your own idea. A lovely infant, been boxed up by nuns and glad to jump the stockade!"

Before she realized it he was gone.

Later, when Dale was wondering how John-Giant would look in a suit made by the best tailor in France, Leswing strolled into the drawing-room humming a song in his pleasant tenor. He was immaculate in white flannels, a black-pearl pin vying with the Cobra for

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supremacy. His grizzled hair was parted boyishly, and the bronze of his cheek shaded the saber cut into a fascinating mark.

"Play for me," he commanded in that light, graceful fashion at which Dale wondered. "I've the nicest surprise present for you — so you must be very nice to me."

"I don't play overly well," she ventured. She fancied he wanted her to dash off into some brilliant *valse*.

"Thanks be to heaven, I'm quite lowbrow! A crude song of We Shall Wander by the River will quite set me off. You know us old boys are not overly steady on our heart pins! That's it. Now I'll have a cigarette if I may — and work myself into a mood as dreamy as a young ladies' seminary."

Lighting his cigarette he watched Dale as she softly played an old love song.

CHAPTER VIII

FACING Leswing across the dinner table Dale experienced a new and startling sensation — that of being fascinated by this frizzled-haired, scarred man of the world, who asked questions with the enthusiasm of a schoolgirl and told anecdotes with the talent of a professional entertainer. She had expected Leswing to be bored with her — after the fashion of such persons in novels. She did not yet realize that Leswing was so utterly bored with life itself that one person more or less could not cause him to acknowledge his ennui.

He drew from her in a remarkably few moments the details of the convent school, the social conditions of Amherst, the desire for a saddle horse and a telephone. His voice, a trifle cloying, made a musical hum in the air after he ceased speaking.

Glenny, nervous as a badger lest some detail of the dinner go awry, nodded her approval. After a weary period of colonial gaucheries, it seemed life to Glenny to watch Leswing, as handsome and well poised as Lord Aldis had been, smiling at Dale with that pleasant

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expression which made the ladies of Africa and London alike hasten to write him three-cornered pink notes.

"Were you ever in New York?" he asked, as he glanced at the table to note several crudities in serving. Glenny had grown decidedly out of practice.

"Easter vacations with the nuns," she said drolly.

"Art gallery, lessons in drawn work, sacred concerts, bedtime at nine-thirty." He smiled sympathetically. "Tough luck to be a girl, is n't it?"

She nodded. She kept thinking of John and that it was very good to be a girl and of how she could best announce her engagement.

"What do you think Africa is like?" he said to bridge a pause.

"Jungle, woolly-headed natives and snakes," she answered honestly; "only you don't look as if you belonged with any of them."

"*Merci, mademoiselle*" — he lifted his cordial glass — "I have an all-consuming penchant for luxuries — so when I became wedded to diamond fields I appointed myself king of a small bit of land and built a palace thereon. I begrudge every moment I am forced to be away."

"Are you all alone?" she said naïvely.

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"Officially." He gave a short laugh. "I've a hundred blacks who do as I say or be sjamboked into eternity. Paradisio is quite a castle, Dale; you've never heard of anything like it. Before I go away I shall describe it."

"Do!" murmured Dale, resting her elbows on the table unceremoniously. Orchard Lodge and Paradisio were decided polarities.

"What do you do evenings?"

Leswing waited for her to give the rising signal.

Dale hesitated, though the chance to speak of John-Giant had come. Those baffling eyes looking at her so steadily betrayed amusement.

"Nothing much," she found herself answering.

"Let's go over on that jolly little island. Do you smoke?" He handed her the cigarette case.

Dale shook her head in a horrified manner. John-Giant's tanned face seemed to look reprovingly out of the summer dusk.

"My dear child, then learn! Nothing is so flat as a woman who cannot smoke daintily — like an egg without salt. Just as an inveterate fiend is decidedly impossible. Try one! Why, my dear infant, don't you know that all your class smoke?" He was amazed at her

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refusal. "Some other time, then. Do you read French? I've some good things in my bag if you like."

They walked over the bridge; Leswing sat down beside the squat Buddha.

"Was this Mirza's?" he said abruptly.

Dale, dabbling her fingers in the lily pool, looked up to nod. "Lord Aldis bought her that, Glenney said."

"I think I remember — a little shop in Prague. What worlds have been born and died since then." He leaned back in reverie.

"How was your face scarred?" Dale demanded with childish frankness.

"Rescuing missionaries from bandits," he chuckled. Then he added: "I shall tell you the truth, for you've eyes which demand it. I was scratched by a French lady of temperamental make-up. She had grown quite beefy — I loathe beefy people — so I gave her some bank notes and a kiss — and tried to escape. She followed with a stiletto hairpin. Too bad to spoil my character right away, Dale, is n't it? But it is the truth."

Dale was silent.

"What are you thinking?"

"How terrible for you both. Could n't you love her any more?"

"Impossible — not another liter of love in

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me. Come, sit beside me! I want to talk of something beside dead affairs."

"Don't you think that a person only really loves once?" she continued, thoughts of John-Giant coming with increasing force.

"Never! We'd be a stupid race if that were so — like only having one dimension. Of course there are many loves — there is the sickening love of youth, and the wild oats as a result; the splendid adventures of middle age; and the glow of Indian summer. I'm sorry to knock your illusions, but that's the way of it. . . . What a pretty frock! It gives you an interesting pallor. Did the nuns pick it out? I should judge so by the cut of the skirt."

She nodded.

"I want to see your frocks; I've an idea I can pick up something in Paris that would suit you."

"Can you buy women's dresses?"

He laughed, flecking the cigarette ash into the lily pool. "I am quite wonderful as a ladies' shopper — even unto matching hair. Let me decide on your perfume. That violet is crude; it belongs to shopkeepers' wives who are trying to be recognized through charities, you know — those knitting bags two yards wide containing mud-colored scarfs for the

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newsies. Rose is for house slaves and clerks; and jockey club for barmaids and models. Magnolia is entirely a spinster's scent, languishing and of forlorn hopes; and lilac is for schoolmarms. Russian ladies are given to those weird combinations that follow your shirt bosoms unto the laundry bag and afterward. Let me see; I can get Piroud, in Paris, to mix you something exclusive —"

"Would n't it be quite expensive?"

Leswing's eyebrows uplifted in almost annoyance. "Beg pardon?"

"I mean, don't you think it wrong to spend so very much money on mere luxuries?" Dale was thinking of the plans she and John had made for buying an extra acre of land.

"I admit that allusions to cheap thrift do fleck me on the raw," Leswing told her. "I presume the nuns with their everlasting humility instilled the idea — but drop it, Dale! The sooner the better! My dear infant, the world is for three purposes: One to make money; another to spend it; and the third, to love as often as one wishes."

Dale watched his slender hands, just a suggestion of a woman's about them, reach up to stroke the scarred cheek, the Cobra winking at her enticingly.

"I don't believe I understand the way you

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think," she said finally; "you are so different from anyone I have ever met."

"How larky! I'm quite a type abroad — only I've more money and I care a trifle less about living, and so on, than the rest. Stop staring up into the sky and tell me about yourself."

"John-Giant—" she began and then stopped. "When do you return?" she said lamely.

"A day or so. I must stop in Paris, for I plan never to leave Paradisio again."

"Never?"

"There's nothing else I care to see or no one I care enough about to live away from it. When I leave Paradisio I shall be correctly togged for the long sleep, and the blacks will sham mourning as the cortège passes." He flung his cigarette into the pool, where it made a little hiss.

"What a horrid future!" Dale remarked bluntly.

"If you saw Paradisio you would understand. What a perfect profile you have! Turn your head, so; a silver coronet would look well hiding among dusky waves. . . . Gamy flapper, I believe. No chance in this silly old place."

"I'm glad you think so." She clasped

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his hand impulsively. "I don't want to stay."

"You need n't. We'll find a chaperon and you may travel. You'll marry or decide to do something. I hope you decide to do something, for if you married you'd love with the fierceness of a lion and the innocence of a lily. Such love can be quite awful," he murmured.

Dale was silent.

"The dew is here. Let's browse in. May I drink upstairs?"

"Please do. Glenny fixed things. I'm afraid I bore you."

They stood in the faded drawing-room, the red lamp making Dale's frock like a rose-clouded dawn.

"You've not been brought up a Continental flapper — but I never did like Continental flappers. American young things are calm and poised, and interested only in two things — themselves and their clothes! Interesting for a dinner or an afternoon, but that is all. You are not a young thing, either. The *jeune fille* is more to my liking; she usually recites war poetry in a well-bred voice, and minuets at costume balls. Our London flappers are always poorly dressed and have an enormous appetite for jam tarts while they chatter of croquet and Zeppelins all in the same breath —"

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"Then whom do you like?" Dale had seemed to grow up to him; she was a graceful young woman instead of a girl of twenty-one.

"No one — everyone," he answered lightly.

"Who likes you?" she returned archly.

"I'm the unfortunate lad, Dale. The women who seek out the Diamond King are always cursed with a mania for flunkies and coronets, pet monkeys and ropes of pearls — tall, stately creatures who demand your devotion. Then I seem to run favorite with the original barnacle girls — little white-faced things with entirely too much soul, yet they eat an amazing quantity of mayonnaise while they tell you of their psychic experiences! Then the widows — Oh, Dalekins, I must devote an entire evening to tell you about widows — they are a race worthy of a whole chapter. Let's say good night!" He was laughing like a schoolboy.

Dale smiled. "If you ever should start to love anyone," she told him, "it would be quite a worn-out affair, wouldn't it?"

Leswing's eyebrows lifted quickly. "I trust I have served my country sufficiently." He gave a military salute.

"How different you are! I fancied you a proper person, who could quote Scripture."

"You don't know how pretty you are when

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you laugh, Dale. I shall call you Glory Dimples. So I'm different? Glory Dimples, do you know that youth and slimness and soft chiffon make an extremely companionable trio? Don't ever go to wearing stiffish things except for riding."

"I never knew men bothered over women's clothes." She was thinking of John-Giant, who looked in reverence at whatever she chose to wear.

"Probably bricklayers don't. But we bad men can tell to a shoe lace what is and what is not becoming."

"I don't think I like that." Dale moved toward the stair.

"Ho — a mind all your own too! Thank fortune! I despise a glib creature who says perfectly lovely after each remark. Do row with me! I'm quite fit for battle."

"I don't know what I like about you most; I think it is that scar" — she played into the spirit — "even if I must pretend that you rescued missionaries. I know what I don't like — your plans for special perfumes and frocks and burying yourself alive in Africa."

"I know what I like about you, Glory Dimples — you," he retorted. "I say, is Mirza's room the same?"

She nodded.

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"The ermine blanket and the Brittany needlework?"

"Would you care to see?"

"A thousand thanks." He tripped after her.

"This room does n't suit you, Glory Dimples. There's one at Paradisio you should have." He glanced carelessly about. "Let me tell you faintly what it is like. It was inspired by the picture of Saint Ursula's Dream — it is in mauve, accented by Italian-marble walls. The white-and-gold bed belonged to the beautiful Lady Hamilton. I will tell you of her sometime. When the doors close chimes of fairy bells play, and opening out of one side is the swimming pool, all done in a silvery sheen with mother-of-pearl shells for a border. You can tiptoe from your room to play mermaid for an hour and not even an elf know that you have so done."

"How very beautiful!"

"Ah, but you should see, not hear. Why, here is a frightful combination — on the cabinet!" He pointed at a filigree bowl crowded with John's offering — Queen Anne's lace and scarlet poppies. "Surely, Glenny has never deteriorated to this. Do you like gardenias? I'll wire for some in the morning."

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Dale threw back her head with a proud defiance. She told herself it had been cowardly snobbish to conceal her engagement. John-Giant, with his honesty, his fresh unspotted love — and Leswing, baffling, fascinating but quite tattered and torn, the Cobra blinking maliciously as his white womanish fingers stole up to the dimpled scar! John-Giant, to whom a dollar meant a book on farming or seed — Leswing, to whom a thousand dollars meant some useless trifle tossed aside when the novelty departed; to whom London, Paris, Vienna were as sparse spots of interest as the neighboring township was to John-Giant. John-Giant with Orchard Lodge — Leswing with Paradisio and his blacks to do his bidding or be sjamboked into eternity! John-Giant with his Laird of McNab, trusty old horse of shaggy mane and altogether too bulky ankles for aught but a brewery — Leswing, who bid for the world's prize stallion and had motors constructed to meet his wildest fancy. John-Giant, simple American of the old school wearing his corduroys and flannels as an honorable uniform — Leswing in white flannels and a cravat of softest silk, with his grizzled head and baffling eyes, which had looked upon life in so many guises that it

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seemed merely an amusing masquerade at which he could swiftly discern each masker and name him cynically!

"They were given me," she said after a pause, "by some one I love. There is something I should have told you as soon as you came. The flowers are from John Coventry's garden — a young farmer, a very wonderful young farmer," she repeated. "And the handsomest young farmer I have ever seen. He is strong too — he lifts me as if I were a feather-weight. He is only twenty-four. When I used to come home with the nuns he would watch me at the station and through a chink in the fence — so you see I have really known him a long time. He was very poor. His father was a fiddler — but his mother was well-born. The family never forgave her marriage. John-Giant has studied nights and worked days on his farm. He has wonderful plans for the future of the American farmer — oh, I know he is going to succeed. He lives in a log cabin — the dearest log cabin —"

"And you love each other and intend to live in the dearest log cabin until these wonderful dreams come true!" Leswing was laughing.

"How did you guess? Only the cabin is to be changed into a white colonial house with green shutters. John will never be content

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with cabins. He is going to raise cattle and —" She stopped, suddenly self-conscious.

Leswing put his hands in his pockets, swaying back and forth. As he did so he upset the vase, and the scarlet poppies and the Queen Anne's lace lay in dripping confusion.

"So sorry," he began, making a pretense at restoration.

"It does n't matter." Dale laid the de-throned offering on a chair.

"Ah — you've not lost time! For a cloistered flapper you have done quite well."

"I love John-Giant," she said simply.

Whereupon Leswing experienced the realization that Glory Dimples was no flat-chested, vague girl to be molded at will. Also, that he was standing in her bedroom — her frilly things for the night lay on the little couch, blue satin slippers peeking from underneath. The canopied bed was opened by Glenny's faithful hands — its fleecy appointments seemed to chide him for his presence. He had been quite unconscious of these facts until she had said "I love John-Giant."

But now he began to follow the blue veins in the slim ivory throat and note the curve of the fullish lips and the violet grayness of her eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said in altogether

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a different tone. Then he laid a satin case on the stand — just where John's flowers had rested. "I told you I had a surprise. May I give it to the future Mrs. John Coventry?"

She opened it, to find a ring holding a diamond of perfect cut.

"Oh, no! It is altogether too wonderful for a farmer's wife — even if John-Giant does become the String Bean Czar! Why, this is worth nearly all that John-Giant owns in the world!" She felt that life was an unfair tyrant taking things away from John-Giant and giving them to Philip Leswing.

"My dear, I'm much older than you" — Leswing's eyes narrowed — "and I loved your father so well that I chose to serve the woman he loved after he was dead."

"And his daughter, too," Dale added humbly.

"Then slip this ring on — tell this John-Giant I am the fairy godfather supplying the engagement symbol."

"Oh, no — that would never do."

Dale stopped in confusion. John-Giant had been planning to have his mother's ring made over for her — a thing of quaint braided gold.

"Very well." Leswing dismissed the matter gracefully. He had also become aware that the dusky brown hair and the satiny

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skin had the odor of crushed white blossoms — they needed no special fragrance. Something stirred in his baffled heart, something which he had believed was quite dead!

“Good night,” he added, “until to-morrow.”

Dale reached up to kiss the scarred cheek. She thought it the proper thing — and also to whisper what the nuns had taught her: “May God bless you and send you a vision.”

He found his way to the drawing-room. Glenny came creeping in.

“As she told you, Master Leswing?”

He nodded. “What sort is he?”

Glenny unburdened her monologue of troubled fears.

Leswing interrupted rudely — he treated Glenny as he did all who labored for him — with infinite contempt. Yet Glenny, as did all his servants, adored him.

“Here, get yourself half a hat!” He handed her a bill. “I’m going out to smoke.”

Passing onto the veranda he sought a hammock and threw himself down in weary fashion. The cigarette glowed like a danger spot in the night. Leswing swung to and fro with a subtle motion. The blue-veined throat and that slim curved figure “I love John-Giant,” she had said. . . .

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And the toss of the proud little dusky head.
... Engaged to John Coventry, a ridiculous
boy of twenty-four given to absurd dreams.
... A bouquet of poppies and Queen Anne's
lace. ... Paradisio with the Saint Ursula
Room waiting for an occupant. ... How
like her father in the way she spoke when she
was angered — how like Mirza when she
walked; and how very well she played the old
love song. ... Magical touch of dewy lips.
... "May God ... send you a vision."
His hand stole up to touch the dimpled scar;
and as he did so the Cobra, herald of disaster
according to the ladies of Africa, showed with
a mocking sparkle.

CHAPTER IX

DALE ALDIS poured Leswing's coffee with an amusing matronly air. In her red morning frock with clever black tassels dripping from the cuffs, and the dusky hair coiled low, she presented an even more interesting study than she had the evening before. Leswing was seldom up for breakfast, of which fact Dale was unaware; but he had left a call with martyred Humphrey for seven o'clock, dragging himself into morning togs with a complaining air.

"Brekker at World's End is n't half bad," he announced.

"Why?" asked Dale, knowing the answer perfectly well.

"Oh, because we have such charming garlands of rosebuds running round our coffee cups! Tell me, when shall I see this mighty gladiator of yours — or does he come peddling his green sass to World's End?"

Dale hated herself for blushing. It seemed a concession to Leswing's bewildering elegance.

"No, not any more; he brings what we want when he comes to see me. He will

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come to-night. I told him he must stay away last night."

"Do I understand, Glory Dimples, that I was the actual and insignificant cause of keeping this gallant in the offing? Flattered in my last years."

Leswing leaned back to laugh, holding up his hands in studied amazement, the Cobra blinking a sinister good morning.

"It is n't fair to make fun," Dale protested, "just because you are a Bohemian —"

"Save the word! I loathe Bohemia, with its bathless existence, its self-winding spaghetti, its combination sinks and writing desks. Never accuse me of anything so low. Rather say I do my correspondence by means of penny postcards."

"What are you, then?" she asked softly.

He leaned across the table, his eyes growing bright as he looked at her, and the scarred face, with its trace of coming age and tale of wasted youth seeming like a thing of bronze — fascinating to look upon in a museum case!

"I'm the Bad Man of Africa!" He hesitated a moment. Trig pranced in to say good morning. "Dale, how can you tolerate that whiskery beast? You should see my pets — lions!"

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"No!" The gray eyes were like an astonished youngster viewing a first circus poster.

"I'll tell it like a real story. Alcibiades and Aristides were two cubs whose mother I shot. It seemed rough to let the little beggars starve; so I found her cave, meaning to knock them in the head — shorter than days of howls and pains in their tummies. They lay asleep, fat pats of butter, with the sun shining to emphasize the effect. I picked one up; it was Alcibiades. He opened those wonderful gold eyes, to look at me with a confiding gaze. 'Where is the mater?' he seemed to say. Then Aristides started up a tune. So I picked up Aristides; and then Alcibiades began to grumble in his funny baby-lion voice that, once you've heard, you never forget. I slung them in my pack and brought them home. We brought them up by hand and they live in a happy Paradisio of their own, acres to romp and prowl about, rocks to lie and sun themselves on while they listen to the boom-boom of the sea. They are as tame as kittens. Everyone warns me of their treachery and the fateful day when they shall taste beefsteak unbroiled and begin to pursue humans. I don't worry. It would n't be so jolly bad to end that way, after all — better than

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to lie for weeks in bed, snuffling like an old woman."

"How can you really have them for pets!"

"Because I like them; and whatever I like I usually have—it is a little habit I've gotten into. I call them Arty and Allie, and that keeps them as tame as schoolboys. Aristides and Alcibiades are merely their dress-up walking-out-with-nana names. I look at them—so"—he fixed his eyes on Dale, with a penetrating expression; "and I keep looking—so—and they crouch at my feet and lick my hand. We often stroll off by ourselves, and sun on the rocks and talk over the topics of the day. I, too, like to listen to the boom-boom of the sea. I think I was a lion in a recent incarnation. I understand the way they must dominate; their pride; their hatred of commonplace, earth-bound things. . . . What a reel of nonsense we've been talking! How did it start? Oh, yes; with Trig. Come here, Trig; here's a chop bone just for good fellowship. What a choice little entrée you'd make for Arty! Still, Arty is a liberal and Allie the radical; so probably it would be Allie—"

"Don't feed him at the table!" protested Dale. "You'll spoil my discipline, and Glenny will scold."

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"I enjoy hearing old women row — it's as much fun as a Spanish burlesque. They always end in tears, and you give them a shilling for drinks while they kiss your hand."

"I don't. And I've taught Trig never to bring bones into the house; it is sure to spot the rugs. You know, ammonia and —"

"Oh, Dale! You're not an index for cleaning remedies, are you? If they spot the rugs — get new ones."

"But that is expensive." Dale was trying to collect herself mentally.

John had a wonderful cleaning fluid which took spots from anything. She wanted him to patent it.

"What is the sense of living unless one is expensive?" Leswing insisted. "Unless I could indulge every whim I wished I would rather go forth and say, 'Come, Arty! Come, Allie!' and lie down on the rocks at their mercy. Don't be petty, Dale! Scrape the butter off the plates and put in a gooey lump for cooking; turn your bonnet ribbons, and so on! You remind me of the Scot visiting London and writing home: 'I had nae been there an hour when — bang! went a sixpence!' You've endless income; enjoy it!"

Dale hesitated. Then she looked out beyond Leswing's grizzled head and said:

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I wanted to talk about my money — John-Giant does n't want it. He will earn everything for me. You see, if things had been different — if they had been married — I should n't mind. But this way is a sop to justice; and I shall never mind being poor."

"How interesting!" Leswing's lips twisted into a cruel smile. "Wash day, steaming tubs of soiled stuff, yellow soap — tons of yellow soap — hungry man wants pork and fried potatoes and pie — then blights come for the choicest potato plants and fairly elope with their blooms, and after you hang out the washing you take a stick and a tattered old basin and go out to poke the bugs into the pan and escort them to their funeral pyre. Or the zero weather strikes through the cracks of the log cabin and the water freezes and you live on sausage and tea and flapjacks and read last year's almanac for days until some one breaks through the roads. Then you find that your awaited mail is a bill for cattle feed and an advertisement for a cream separator! Dale, what a heroic youngster you are — show me this John-Giant who has so bewitched you."

"We have talked of all this — and more" — the gray eyes were desperately in earnest — "and I still do not wish the money. It

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has never made me happy. It made Mirza happy — that is, it made it easy for her to be unhappy, she could grieve to her heart's content. I sometimes think it would have been better if she had worked."

"She would have died," said Leswing swiftly.

"That was merely staved off a few years. We can give back the money, can't we? You know what I must do."

"You must convince me first that you want to — I suppose we can do something with it — one usually can. Lady Aldis has enough of her own; she would not care to be annoyed. We could give it to some charity if you like. Charities always bore me — fussy women in unbecoming hats making speeches about the high cost of breadstuffs and pushing steaming teacups into your hands. Let's see — you could leave an endowment for oranges for original dipsomaniacs or muffs of pink roses for rheumatic charwomen." He chuckled as if amusing himself.

"Are you never serious — do you do nothing for the poor — you with all your millions?"

"Nothing. I don't approve of poor people. I have never been interested in them, and I do nothing unless it interests me. That is my own beautiful scheme of things. I occa-

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sionally take a delight in saving some rapscallion from the gallows because his daring pleased me and I delight to return him, dangerous and revengeful, to a narrow-minded community that will seethe with unrest! Sometimes I have staked a young boy of my own class who has gambled and come a cropper, and once a princess went into bankruptcy because she loved a gypsy actor and lost her jewels somewhere about his person, it was believed. I helped her a trifle. But ordinarily, if you mean orphans and widows and wayward young ladies staying out entirely too late — no!”

“How cruel! Yet you practically can own anything in the world that you wish for!”

“I do own everything I wish for — I dip into the most sacred art collections and take my titbit. There is nothing for which I wish.”

“Then there is nothing for which to live,” she supplemented wisely.

“Hark to the sage! Glenny, the coffee was mud. There are some grease spots to clean — Trig had a side of mutton. Come, Dale, let’s go for a morning spin!”

Bowing meekly Glenny muttered her apologies. There was a hurt look in her wrinkled face as Leswing left the room. Dale turned back.

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"The chops were lovely," she said kindly.

But not coming from her god Glenny's hurt was unappeased.

The scarlet car was panting outside the gate; it seemed a tempting creature wooing one from work.

"I always practise after breakfast," Dale began. "Perhaps you've letters to write?"

"I never write letters — I cable."

"You wrote me," she said with unconscious egotism.

"I had the toothache. I was not myself," he retorted. "Let's drive — a fig for practising! Always do what you want to do, Dale. Get your bonnet! I'll wait here."

A moment later, with a silk scarf over her arm and an adorable little flower-pot of a hat, Dale pranced down the walk. Leswing opened the car door with the air of a foot-man.

"What a joy!" She bounced among the cushions.

"I picked it up in New York because I loathe railroads. You may have it," he added carelessly, "if you'll learn how to drive."

"Really? Oh, no — no! You mustn't —"

"Call it my engagement present," he chuckled; "and don't bore me with thanks because I loathe gratitude. Show me the

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way to rambling old farmhouses. I'm in search of a clock — a painted, wooden-framed clock — you know the sort. I've a New England room at Paradisio; it lacks a clock. There are splint-bottomed chairs, rag rugs, a spinning wheel, and blue-and-white dishes on a mahogany cupboard; but we lack a clock."

"When do you use the New England room?"

"When I read my letters from my aunts" — he made a wry face — "but I like the contrast between that and an Italian drawing-room which opens off it. When I have attacks of conscience I go there to repent and am uncomfortable for a whole fifteen minutes. You didn't know I had a conscience, did you Dale? The truth is, it is the best-behaved little conscience you have ever met — it never troubles me! There — that house looks plummy! Stop!"

They drew up before the slanting dwelling. Chickens walked boldly across the sunken doorstone. Cracked shades were drawn unevenly at the front windows; neglected shrubbery and flowers made a gloomy entrance. A woman with a thin, tired figure was pumping water from a sulky spout. She drew a great pailful and struggled to carry it.

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"Oh, she can't," said Dale impulsively.

"Carry that water wherever she wants and tell her to come out to the car," he told the chauffeur. "I don't like the looks of the house; we better not attempt going in."

Quite bewildered the woman came toward them. She had been pretty once, but her blond hair was cruelly faded by the sun into burnt wisps, snarled in an untidy heap with cheap wire pins thrust crossways. Her cotton dress was soiled and buttonless, and the neck opened to show a drawn throat. A string of imitation coral was clasped round it — pitiful attempt at finery. Her feet, misshapen from work and poor footgear, were thrust into "his" slippers. She had no stockings and the flapping rim of her dress betrayed the fact. She kept working her bony hands in embarrassment. Her faded blue eyes were red about the rims and when she spoke one saw that her teeth were either broken or missing.

"I beg pardon," Leswing lifted his hat in cavalier fashion; "I was looking for a clock — an old-fashioned wooden clock with a painted border. Have you such a thing about the place?"

There was one which had been "his" mother's, she said. She guessed he could have it; it had n't gone in years. She would get

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it if they liked, or they could come in. The place was n't very orderly, she had n't been well and "he" was busy and the children were too little yet to help. Towhaired mites crept round her skirts as she talked, peering up at the strangers.

Leswing told her to bring it out. Then he leaned back in the car to study the landscape.

"I suppose this is considered an average farm, is n't it?" he asked presently.

"It is Mr. Abner's, I think."

John-Giant had told Dale that it was, and that he was an expert along raising certain things.

The woman and the children returned with the clock. It needed regluing, but it was what Leswing wanted. He laid it carefully in the bottom of the car and asked the price.

"I guess a couple of dollars — he don't care much about it," she said in the same weary tone.

Leswing handed her a ten-dollar bill. She gave an ejaculation of surprise and handed it back.

"Would you make it a two-dollar bill — and the rest in different money?" She twisted her hands with nervousness.

"Ah, then your husband will not know the exact selling price; is that the idea?" Leswing

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was the most sympathetic person in the world; the tenderness of his tone could have easily belonged to a visiting divine!

She nodded. "He's gotten awful close lately," she confided, cheered by the unexpected gift. "When we were married he was n't like this at all. He had the place all fixed up and a woman come in to wash." She gave a mirthless laugh. "I guess farming makes a man sort of close — he has to work so hard and get so little. People don't know how hard it is — and he's had bad luck for two years. One year we lost a cow and the next a horse. That's a lot —"

"Is he a truck farmer?" said the tender voice. Dale winced.

"Yes, sir, he mostly raises garden stuff; there is n't anything quite so hard. I was n't used to a farm. I taught school down to Trilby. But I thought it would be a fine way to live. We never meant to get so run down — it was just hard luck. Then the children came and they took lots of time and I had to get along the best way I could. My, I'm glad my mother is n't alive — she'd have been ashamed to have me talk to strangers like this. . . . She wanted me to marry a city man — sometimes I wished I had — only I liked John. He's always meant well

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— he wishes things were different for me and the children. I'll never let my little girls marry poor farmers — not if they're old maids." She laid her worn hand protectingly on the yellow bobbing heads. "I guess I look about forty, but I'll only be thirty-two next fall. I fade easy, John says, and I've got a bad back. My head gets dizzy if I weed much in the sun."

"How long have you been married?" asked Leswing.

"Since I was nineteen. I only taught school a year. I had enough saved for my clothes. That was all. I often thought of the two silk dresses I had — I used the last patch of the one I was married in — blue with a pink sprig — to make my oldest girl a shirred bonnet. I think shirred bonnets are sweet, don't you?" she asked Dale.

"Very," Dale heard herself answer.

"But I don't care so much about clothes if I could get my teeth fixed. I never thought I'd let 'em go like I have. I had pretty teeth, if I do say so. John, he wanted me to get 'em fixed, but we have n't had the money and it's so far to go to town and the dentist only comes once a week. It just seems as if it was n't meant for me to get them fixed. If I could have my teeth fixed and a woman to do the

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washing I would n't ask anything else. . . . My land, what a lot of things you have to do without — don't you? If I'd known what I know now when I was teaching school — well —" She looked down at the children.

"But the babies?" said Dale softly.

"The poor kids will have to scramble to get a start. If his rheumatism gets worse he won't be able to keep things going like he has. I guess maybe his sister would take the children and we could peddle tinware. They say there's a living in that — Oh, thank you, sir!"

Leswing had wearied of the monologue and signaled to start.

"I wish you good morning." He raised his hat again.

"Good-by, Mrs. Abner," Dale called back. The car shot ahead.

"I've thought out two frocks for you; I'll get them in Paris." With the wisdom of long experience Leswing knew better than to drive home the moral of the little visit; it would sink into fertile soil unmolested. Contrast was the necessary element to supply.

"One is a cracking military serge with collar and cuffs of braided red, and the other an evening creation of orange velvet with lace draped and not desecrated by sewing. You

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can wear a silver coronet with that dusky hair and carry a fan that is a mass of faint yellow plumes."

"Where will I wear it — to pump water in?" said Dale bitterly. She was thinking out loud.

Leswing smiled — how convenient that youth is plastic!

"Oh, to be sure! You're to marry John-Giant — another John — are n't you — and give back the money? Then I must order overalls and a sunbonnet and give you an order on the traveling dentist. Dale, look at the trees off there — like a Corot, are n't they? Did I ever tell you —" He tactfully drifted into an anecdote of French country life.

On the way back they passed Orchard Lodge. With a loyal finger Dale pointed out John working in his garden.

"Shall we stop to say hello?" asked Leswing graciously.

Dale shook her head. It would be unfair to John, she told herself — entirely unfair. Wait until John-Giant came to World's End and stood side by side with Leswing.

CHAPTER X

JOHN came eagerly to World's End. The evening spent at the log cabin alone, knowing Dale was otherwise occupied, was quite an ordeal, though she had written a comfort note telling him she loved him and that she would arrange about the money as soon as Mr. Leswing came.

He had written a reply to bring with him the following night, and he told himself he was a jealous, foolish person, and instead of thanking his stars because Dale loved him in spite of everything and understanding everything — poor Dale and poor John! — there he was making himself needlessly miserable.

He wore his best suit, the newly ordered mail-order suit costing thirty-three dollars, and a necktie which Dale had given him. He walked up the veranda steps with his steady tread, to surprise Leswing in the midst of a vague reverie. For a brief moment John's deep-sea eyes rested disapprovingly in the direction of Leswing's scarred face. As men read men, so John divined in Leswing's elegant cynical self many things at which Dale merely wondered; and so Leswing, glancing

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unwillingly at the broad-shouldered, honest John-Giant, understood the reason for Dale's love!

Dale tripped to the door. She, too, was dressed in her best. The dusky hair set off gray chiffon and a string of pearls to advantage.

"John, this is Philip Leswing — Philip Leswing, this is John Coventry. Please be very fond of each other." She nestled in a large chair and awaited the painful obeying of her command.

Leswing's white evening suit seemed to sneer at the gray-mixture Norfolk with its uneven humps about the shoulders, though John had underlined the order sheet where it said "broad or narrow shoulders" — and the cotton thread carelessly stitched about the cuffs was glaringly noticeable. His nails, broken from struggling to mend a hand cultivator, seemed unusually apparent, and the rim of mud on his boots called attention to Leswing's slim, patent-leather pumps made by Farrierre, of Paris — who took no orders of less than fifteen hundred dollars.

"Is n't it attractive on the hill?" began Leswing, amused at the situation.

"Very," growled John-Giant. "Do you like the animal cemetery?" And then he

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sneezed and was infinitely embarrassed, while Dale wondered why he did not talk as usual and prove to Leswing the wonders of his lovable self.

"Tell about the little calf," she urged.

John flushed; it was a mawkish incident to repeat before this dazzling man who seemed to possess World's End all in the twinkling of an eye.

"Oh, that was n't much," he protested.

"Yes, it was — mimic the calf! You do it so well."

"Do, I beg of you," murmured Leswing, lifting his hand characteristically to touch the scar, the Cobra sneering at John's modest scarfpin.

So John did — and very poorly — so poorly that even Dale was ashamed.

She did not urge him to tell another incident, but instead turned to Leswing to demand a description of an African native feast. Long practised in the art, Leswing obeyed, telling it with such dramatic force that even John was thrilled.

Then he rose gracefully. "I leave you two to the glories of the moon," he said lightly. "I must have a word with Friend Buddha; he seems utterly neglected. Dale, dear, if the dew comes get your shawl," he added.

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Dale nodded. She was proud of the way he knew how to exit as gracefully as he entered. John-Giant would have scraped his chair legs, and twisted thumbs, hemmed and hawed — she was really provoked at him for failing to display his brilliancy.

"Well," she said after Leswing tripped down the steps, "are n't you glad to see me?"

"You know I am." His was the injured voice of youth. "I bet you did n't think about me last night."

"Yes, I did! Did you read my letter or throw it in the fire!" Dale was equally injured.

"I can repeat every word of it. I brought an answer." He held out the envelope.

Dale tucked it in the bosom of her dress. "I missed you terribly, John. Did you work hard to-day?"

"Yes, and I'm about discouraged too — potato bugs running amuck! I was up at half past four this morning, and then the day was too short." He smothered a yawn.

"Half past four," Dale sighed. Leswing had told her of a hunt ball in London where they began the cotillion at half past four of a spring morning!

"I often get up then."

"Do you? That seems a frightful hour — I never could."

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"I'd never want you to," he said quickly.

"Don't you like Mr. Leswing?" Dale changed the subject.

"I guess so. I don't know him yet. Do you?"

"Yes, he's fascinating! He brought me the most wonderful ring in the world — the stone came from his own mines."

"A diamond ring?" The deep-sea eyes darkened.

"You won't have to get me one." Dale was unconscious of the insult.

"Well, before you have another man's ring —" he began sharply.

"How silly — when I know you ought not afford it!"

"Never mind that. I'd sell the whole darned place before I'd let you wear it. Dale, you're mine. That means a lot does n't it?" His voice was taut with force.

Dale felt thrilled, bewildered, all in one. Womanlike she instantly thought that if Leswing only had John-Giant's youth or John-Giant had Leswing's diamond mines —

"Don't be horrid!" she told him. "It is n't an engagement ring — just a present. He's given away a great many before."

"What did he say when you told him we were engaged?"

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"He was very nice about it — nicer than you are to-night."

"I want to be nice to you always." John's strong arm encircled her.

She felt comforted. Then she leaned her head on his shoulder. "We drove by Abner's farm to-day; in fact, we stopped there to buy a clock. Mr. Leswing wanted one for his New England room. I'll tell you about his wonderful house some day. Mrs. Abner looked like a wreck. She told us she taught school a year in Trilby and that she never dreamed her married life would be so hard — her teeth are all out and her hair faded and she does her washing, and chickens walk all over the porch. Oh, I should think she would die —"

"Abner has had hard luck," John defended. "He thinks a lot of his wife; he told me so. He was proud of her being a school-teacher. She loved him, too, or they would n't have married. It's just the way things happened to turn out for them, dear." Then he kicked a chair away roughly with his boot.

"It is terrible for her, she is so isolated." Dale was unconscious how she was hurting. "I could have cried with her. We gave her ten dollars for the clock, and she asked to have it in different bills so Mr. Abner wouldn't

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know how much she had — I don't believe she has had extra money in years."

"Well, there was n't any extra money!" John cried out with a flash of jealous temper. "Abner has worked a lot harder than I have and he's had children to support. He is no ogre — merely a human being in hard luck. You don't understand, Dale, or else you don't want to understand."

"Which is most unfair — you know I do!" She put her cool cheek against his flushed one. "Just that I never saw a woman like Mrs. Abner. . . . John, I am beginning to realize I have never thought very much about many things."

He loosened his arm. "Have n't you, Dale? Perhaps you want to think carefully before you marry me."

"John-Giant," Dale's voice trembled, "please don't say that —"

"Then forgive me — I promise not to doubt again. You are everything that is splendid, Dale; more than anyone could ever deserve — only you seemed so different to-night. Perhaps it was because I sneezed," he added lightly; "or that Leswing is different. That is it — it is Leswing, a rich man who has never known the blessed pain of toil. And I'm not at ease in these clothes, Dale. I want

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my 'uniform' until I'm a gentleman. Then if I dared I'd take to bow pipes and high stocks and ruffles — honestly — knee breeches with silver-buckled shoes. I believe I could play quite a Chesterfield if I had the wardrobe. But this sort of stuff — near-gentleman — only makes me long for an ax and a woodpile and an honest flannel shirt. Don't you see, dearest, that when you realize a dream and it threatens to become a nightmare it is a terrifying experience? When we are married things will be different. We will have no more moments of doubt." He kissed her on the lips.

She was silent, her fingers stroking his hair. Then she said frankly: "I love to have you want me so fiercely, John-Giant. . . . I wonder if Mr. Leswing ever wanted anyone."

"Did he never marry?"

"No, but he — he had affairs." Dale blushed prettily. "You see, he was the youngest son of a rich family. When he was about twenty-five he suddenly ran off to Africa — no one just knows why — and there he happened to strike luck. He has a place called Paradisio — a palace with pet lions and wonderful rooms and a swimming pool and a hundred black servants —"

"When's he going back?" demanded John-Giant.

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"In a few days."

"There's going to be a play at the town hall Friday — want to go?"

"Love to!"

"Then we will. And I've sent for some raffia, Dale. I'm going to weave you baskets — you said you liked dark blue and scarlet, so that's what I got."

"You're a dear!" She kissed his forehead impulsively.

"Did you speak about the — money?" he asked presently.

"Yes. We have n't definitely thought what to do. Mr. Leswing can't understand, he's so different and has so much money. But I told him to give it back. . . ."

Dale drifted into a reverie, debating whether or not to mention the gift of the despised American limousine.

"Of course, Dale, you don't know how different it will be. Maybe I'm not square to ask you to give it back" — he was struggling to be fair; "only I won't marry you and live off your money; and it is n't honest money, either."

"I don't mean you shall." She rose and looked over on the island, to see joss burn up in curly little spirals. Leswing must have been lighting it.

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"It is n't the things money buys that count as much as the things it saves you from," John told her soberly. "Of course you've gotten it into your little head that you'll be Mrs. Abner the second, have n't you? Dale, before I'd see you turn into a Mrs. Abner I'd send you back — to — World's End —"

"But it would be too late," she reminded; "I'd have left World's End!"

"Well, we won't ever let it come — no — matter — what." He kissed her after each word.

Then they fell talking of delightful nothings and impossible plans, reveling in the freshness of their love and the firmness of their conviction. Youth is always so firm of convictions!

On the little island Leswing rested among the graves of the departed pets, smoking slowly and rubbing his scarred cheek often. The Cobra was his companion: it twinkled and blinked and sparkled and glowed and settled into a cold white light which made even starshine dim by comparison. Leswing was dreaming of youth — and dusky brown hair with grave gray eyes underneath — youth, the only thing he could not purchase, the only private collection he could not dip into and loot as he willed. As John possessed intuition to tell him which way the wind blew, so Leswing pos-

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sessed experience, a more sardonic but reliable guide. . . . It would not take long to win Dale, he decided. The little Cobra twinkled with glee. He would deliberately set to work to win youth — Dale was merely the personification of it — to complete his conquest of the world, of life itself!

As Lord Aldis had taken Mirza from every environment she had ever known, every connection she had made or been born to, so he would take Dale! Aldis had known how to set to work to fascinate unto victory — how brightly the Cobra shone with the steady cruelty of a persevering magician! Well, Leswing understood the same art — now. It would not require a tedious passage of time or effort — for coming age offered no great endurance as an asset — it would require deliberate scheming. No crude dramatic tactics of a misunderstanding — that would be a bad *faux pas*. There must be an explicit and lasting understanding between the three — an understanding that should be the foundation of his victory. Dale must want to surrender her youth to him, even as she now sat on the veranda, her slim fingers laid in strong hands, and whispered that youth must know and love but youth!

Leswing would stay the sands of the hour-

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glass, or rather Dale would stay them for him — her young, pale self with the grave gray eyes — Dale at Paradisio, wearing the orange velvet and lace frock — in his emerald-green room with its paneled rosewood and murky mirrors, silk sofas and walls with the pattern of wonderful willow trees and a silvery green sky. . . . By such things he would veil the gray eyes to his old age. . . . He wanted to see her in the breakfast room with its tempting white plush and faded rose and gold embroideries; he wanted her dressed in sapphire crêpe, sitting on the loggia to watch the blacks march in twos before her. He felt his heart no longer faintly stir but throb with tremulous longing; he must have Dale — for Dale was youth, and youth was the only thing in the world which his purse had not brought to the doorstep of Paradisio and whined that he look upon and purchase!

The Cobra began blinking again — warning of dangers in the way. Leswing tossed his cigarette aside. He must have Dale, he must have youth — youth with dewy lips and eyes of innocence and heart of girlish whiteness. Youth — how strange that never before had the desire been so strong!

With the same intent that he set to work to win the name of diamond king so he would

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set to work to win Dale, deftly, quite free of censure or detection. No one would know — not even Dale. The Cobra blinked with smug satisfaction as Leswing rubbed the dimpled scar.

Meantime John-Giant had taken his lingering good-by.

"Shall I call Mr. Leswing?" Dale whispered. "Oh, John-Giant, I love you so much — you're wonderful, really wonderful! You see, I'm thinking aloud."

"No. Tell him good night for me," he said curtly; "and to-morrow, remember what you promised about the money. Good night, Dale — I'll dream of you."

"Until half past four A.M.," she finished mischievously.

After he left she surprised Leswing by appearing on the bridge and cooing softly.

"John left a good-by," she said, wondering if Leswing would feel slighted.

"Ah, then a mere prosaic person may return to the veranda. I've been banished among the graves long enough." He walked over the bridge; in the dark she did not see the flush of the bronzed face.

"I did n't mean to banish you; we were merely talking of —"

He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder.

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"This ruffle is rumped from the wind, I presume?"

Dale laughed.

"You are very happy, are you not?"

"Oh, very!"

"Are you going to kiss me good night?" he asked.

She hesitated. "I just kissed John-Giant," she told him cruelly.

"Good," blinked the Cobra; "she realizes you are not a graybeard or herself an infant!"

"Then, mademoiselle —" Leswing lifted her hand, and the grizzled head bent over that his lips might touch it.

When Dale reached her room the diamond ring lay in its case beside the empty flower vase. She slipped it on her finger, enjoying the sparkle.

"You tempter!" she said. "I believe I'll ask Mr. Leswing if I may set you in a scarf-pin. Then John-Giant could n't be horrid any more."

CHAPTER XI

IN the morning Dale happened upon Leswing unexpectedly. He was fencing with Humphrey, an unwilling victim, holding his sword in a graceful pose. In his shining black togs Leswing seemed a boy — the light was dim — and he danced to one side to make way for her, announcing "Long live the Queen!" and doing a fantastic little step.

"Let me teach you how," he begged.

"I could n't learn. I'm entirely too tall," she protested.

"Nonsense! Find your gymnasium suit like a good creature and we'll have a go at it."

So they spent the greater part of the morning playing at learning in a delightful fashion. Throwing down his mask and foil Leswing commanded her to do the same.

"You must never overdo anything; the charm vanishes like the sun during a rain-storm," he told her. "Always remember that. Now I feel bound to amuse you because you have amused me. What shall we do?"

"But I've enjoyed it," protested Dale, her cheeks faintly pink from the exertion. And

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she wondered if John-Giant would be too tired from chopping trees on his woodlot to fence with her of an evening. The contrast suggested itself — John in overalls and high boots, chopping trees; Leswing in shining satin with an alluring red heart, fencing!

"I'll pianologue for you — would you like that?"

They had shoved aside the furniture in scandalous fashion. Humphrey was set to work to rescue the piano from the farther end of the room.

"Do! I did n't know you played." Dale sat beside him on the bench.

Halfway placing an arm round her he skillfully picked chords solely with his left hand, and in a dreamy voice told in French the story of the handsome clown who loved the midinette and came singing under her window, and of the battle cry which caused him to lay off his chalk and ruffles and take his sword and march away, while the midinette sobbed in her attic and sewed on a black frock!

Dale was like a child hearing its first nursery rime.

"Play another," she whispered.

"Au Clair de la Lune," proposed Leswing, his graceful hand with the sparkling Cobra moving deftly over the keys. Then there came

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an old lullaby and a wild Russian folk song and, to Dale's surprise, he hummed Suwanee River with genuine American enthusiasm.

He stopped to say: "That is one of my plays when I am lonesome at Paradisio. You'd think me nothing but a jester if I told you all of them."

"Tell me!" she begged; "please tell me!"

Keeping his right hand about her waist and now and then striking just the right minor chord to meet his words Leswing added:

"I celebrate every holiday on record, Dale. Paradisio is a year of holidays: I've your American Thanksgiving and Fourth of July, Canada's Harvest Home, the Jew's Purim, the Gypsy's Carnival, the Russian Church Days, the — Why go through the list? But on each day I have the native dishes and follow native customs as nearly as possible."

"Who is with you?"

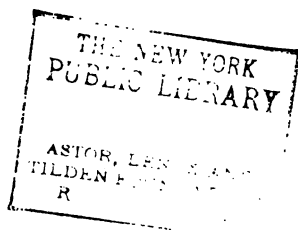
"Sometimes friends — more often I am alone." It seemed as if the Cobra must have picked the eerie chord.

"Why do you never marry?" she said slowly.

"I should never marry anyone unless I could worship her as a good heathen does his idols. I can imagine nothing more beautiful than such a love and such a marriage — noth-



“I should never marry anyone unless I could worship her”



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ing more jangling and sordid than the flat romance of ninety-nine per cent of the world — with disillusionment to follow as swiftly as the bridal corsage fades! My wife must be my ideal. A number of women have fancied they would like to marry me because I own Paradisio. I am not deceived. But because improbable things are always charming I like to think of my marriage to some one young and innocent of spotted things, some one to whom I might be a protection during my life and my wealth a protection after my death. . . . There is nothing in the world I would not do to win some one if I loved her. . . . I always win what I set out to possess. Oh, Dale, you're getting me to be a reminiscent old bachelor! Have I told you of my little courtyard looking at the sea? It is like a scene from a Hindu fairy tale."

"Are there really such places?"

"People have asked that when I have been traveling, and when they visited Paradisio they have said, 'Now we know there are such places.'"

He picked a trio of chords ascending the scale — mocking, brilliant laughs.

Dale's eyes were dark with excitement — the Cobra's charm was working. She glanced at her rumpled gymnasium suit, the shabby

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furnishings. Then she rose as if to break the spell.

"I go to-morrow."

"Will you come back?" She wondered why she asked.

"Do you wish it?" The Cobra winked maliciously.

"We have n't decided about the money — you must come."

"And if not, will you forget me?"

"I shall never forget you," Dale said distinctly; "you have been so wonderful!"

The grizzled head tilted gayly on one side. "*Merci!*"

"Why could you become diamond king — you who are so beautifully an idler?"

"Luck, my child! Never give me the halo of the honest workingman in my youth. I possessed none of the energy or dreams of your John-Giant; in fact, I would have been hopeless had not my coolies sweated for me and my managers worried over accounts, my salesmen found my markets. I was born to idle, to live like the prince of a fairy tale." He twirled his sword.

"Will you write me?" Dale heard herself asking.

"Let us hope I may do something more graceful."

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"What?"

"That would be telling. This John-Giant writes you letters, does he not — leaves them in the old tree stumps — with crosses at the end for kisses?" He watched her flush. "So I thought. . . . Are your engagement tablets overcrowded or could you spare the afternoon for a last drive? I presume John-Giant will kidnap you this evening."

"I will drive with you," Dale said slowly, "because we must stop at John's cabin. He would feel slighted if we did not come."

Leswing made a little *moue*.

"Surely you can spare ten minutes — think of the years at Paradisio!"

"Sometimes I believe those years could be extremely rapid ones because they could be so happy —" he began. Then bringing his heels together he made a correct little bow and left the room.

He ordered his luncheon upstairs, and Dale, lonesomely playing with a salad and a jam tart, wondered why the years at Paradisio could be so rapid, and if Africa harbored some willful woman who refused to love Leswing and make him happy — Leswing, who was contrary to everything she had been taught, and a completely delightful surprise.

She dressed with care for the good-by

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drive — in an old-fashioned wine taffeta with a smart black toque feathered Indianwise.

Leswing nodded approval as he saw her. He plunged into stirring stories of African hunts as the car dipped along the green roads — things of physical endurance and bravery, with himself always as the clever hunter nonchalantly triumphant. He had a wise fashion of never admitting his lack of physical strength — if there was something heavy to be moved he managed so that Humphrey or Glenny did the tugging, though apparently he could have done it more easily than not, save that he would have interrupted Dale in some trivial speech. Leswing's was the art of subtle flattery, John's the tribute of sincere admiration.

They were nearing the cabin before Dale penetrated the delightful aura of adventurous romance to say: "The money — we must decide about it."

The Cobra twinkled wisely under its owner's silk glove. "Do you know what poverty means, Dale?"

"It won't be poverty but simple living —" She paused, unable to convince him, or, strangely enough, herself that this was the truth. She needed John-Giant's presence to bring the joyous disregard of possessions.

"I shan't let you go into something of

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which you know nothing. It is not fair, any more than to teach a person one system of theology, and make him swear by it, and damn the rest of the disagreeing world. If your father and mother were alive, Dale, they would do as I shall — they would not send you pell-mell into something of which you know nothing. You fancy that your entire future lies in marrying John-Giant — and helping him peddle onions!”

“But I love him!”

“How do you know you do — how do you know what love is, Dale?”

“Why, you know,” she faltered; “you — just — know.”

“That is blindfold romance, surely erring every time it tags a victim. Romance makes so many mistakes, Dale. Experience is the wiser guide. When you love again —”

“But one only loves once!”

Leswing’s eyes brightened. “So? And does John-Giant agree — or was this from some motto calendar?”

“We both agree,” Dale said solemnly.

“Then you both will have a sad and inevitable awakening. It would be unfair of destiny to appoint but one love to one life! How can one gain wisdom, broadness of viewpoint or experience if one must stifle romance

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at twenty-one with white muslin and blue ribbons and keep it in leash until it has a golden anniversary, sucking a last tooth in romantic content! Bah! My child, you need to see the world — this is World's End!"

"John is to be my world."

"Very good. I grant you that John is a splendid specimen of youth, with a slight tendency to celluloid collars and mail-order catalogues — that sort of thing. I don't deny but what the experience has been beneficial to you both — mild garden oats — but before you do as this clock damsel did — er — Mrs. Abner — why not travel —"

"I shan't be a Mrs. Abner. You can't frighten me."

"But how, *mon enfant* most precious, if you have never known poverty, are you to gauge your own endurance of it? Is it fair? Suppose the nuns had said: 'You must remain here willy-nilly, embrace the faith and the habit and discipline.' You would have rebelled, would you not? You would have protested 'First I must see the world!' Which would be correct — for you were not meant for a religious vocation — or a poor man's wife. It is not fair to yourself or to John-Giant," he added deftly, "to enter his life unless you feel you can truly share it. Why not a tiny peep at the world, Dale?"

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The car had stopped before Orchard Lodge.

Dale looked away from Leswing. "I am quite satisfied," she said in an amusingly patronizing voice which hid a seething unrest. Leswing knew of the unrest — so did the Cobra — and they were both satisfied. The game they were playing was a maze, tangling and baffling to the uninitiated, but certain to win!

John-Giant met them with a boyish welcome. Dale noted that his nails were rimmed with earth and the creases of his neck perspiring from the sun. He had been weeding, he informed them.

Leswing stepped about the garden pointing out this or that need of improvement with an interested scientific air, asking if this or that was the case and suggesting remedies for blight and pestilent beasties. John-Giant growled his answers — Leswing hummed. Dale looked at the flower garden for relief of mind. The cabin seemed anything but a "wonderful" place. When Leswing's elegant self sat in the homemade chair each dusty crevice and imperfection was paramount. It was the museum of a self-made man's attempt at a home. Realizing this John became distinctly ill at ease.

Leswing refused the cake and milk — so

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did Dale. The milk seemed sickish and the cake a lumpy mixture, though heretofore it had constituted no end of delightful "parties."

"Dale tidied me up one day," John-Giant began telling Leswing; "you should have seen how well she made it look!" Then he trailed into silence as Leswing replied with a smart bit of French verse.

"John-Giant has the loveliest place to show you," Dale ventured to break the silence, "the Panama Rocks. . . . But of course you've seen everything lovely in the world, have n't you?"

"Now that I have met you, I can truthfully say I have." Leswing's eyes narrowed ever so slightly as they looked at her.

"Then the rocks will probably not interest you," John-Giant stood before the fireplace, his brawny self seeming sprawly, as clumsy as a Newfoundland puppy. The semi-quaintness of his clothes had changed into semi-absurdity and Dale found herself wondering why, oh, why, did not John-Giant prove the worth of his mind and heart and impress Leswing as she had been impressed?

"Oh, if they interest *you*, Dale," Leswing answered, "and *you*, my lad," there was the faintest, sardonic inflection on the pronoun, "don't bar me out. What are they, pray?"

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"Just an old glacial deposit, I think — we're such a flat country around here that anything bumpy at all attracts us. I don't advise your taking the trip, Mr. Leswing," John-Giant's voice, brutally rude, as Dale told herself, almost bordered on the nasal, "there are two acres of them — merely moss-covered rocks and queer caves — you know the sort of thing. Dale liked them because they were a novelty."

"It's such fun to ramble all over — we spent a day there and forgot luncheon time — do you remember how vexed Glenney was — and how the old man came and peered over the ledge to laugh at us?"

"Really!" Leswing's eyebrows were uplifted and the Cobra kept sparkling angrily.

"We went into every room we could find — sat in the wishing-chair and I knelt at the shrine and stood in the bridal bower — why, I think they are fascinating, John-Giant, and so did you — until this very moment. Don't be horrid and not take us. He knows every inch of the place — and we must make him go," she turned back to Leswing. "It is quite easy to be lost over there."

"I suppose you have been there numberless times — quite a traveler," the sardonic inflection was even more noticeable.

John-Giant did not bother to answer.

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With a rude gesture he jerked a pipe from a carved rack. "Sorry I have no cigarettes."

"Don't mention it," the smooth, white hand with the flashing Cobra slipped inside Leswing's pocket and returned bearing a platinum case with a prominent initial of small but exquisite diamonds. The Cobra kept winking in triumph and whispering, "Watch Dale's eyes — she has seen the contrast . . . so has he!"

"When shall we go over there?" Dale insisted willfully, bent on her own way.

Leswing smothered a yawn. "Sure, I don't care — I'm in the hands of my friends — and enemies," here a little laugh, "just as you like — only do take my car. I loathe rural methods of traveling. How long will it take to browse about — an hour?"

"Oh, no — a day — we have to have our dinner there and drink from a beautiful spring out of oak-leaf cups — and a funny old man named Hi Backus owns the place and we have to talk to him," Dale was all enthusiasm. "You see, we really need to take a day." Surely, she thought, John-Giant's real self would be brought into prominence at the Panama Rocks!

"I'm afraid I could n't stay concert pitch for a day — say an afternoon and I'll forego

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the charm of some bridal bower or shrine," he drawled, letting a thin stream of smoke float gracefully towards the puffs of John-Giant's pipe. "I fancy I know the sort of place — I've something the same at Paradise — about twenty-five acres of it — with a bridal falls, three hundred feet high — the blacks named it so because there is a constant veil of spray — and a good many rainbows. The older blacks worship there — they think it a resting-place of the gods, I suppose . . . it has been their picnic ground as well," he looked at John-Giant quite impersonally as he spoke.

"Really? Twenty-five acres and a bridal falls — how wonderful! — and lots of caves?"

"They say so — seedy-looking individuals with bothersome hammers and diaries and letters from research geographical societies have bothered me at times — they seem to think it is quite top-hole — I believe American magazines have printed illustrated articles about it — all that sort of thing. I never bothered to read them. I have no interest in the spot. However, if you like, Dale," a tender inflection of the voice and a bright twinkle of the Cobra, "we will do it any time you say."

"Well, if Mr. Leswing has such a wonder-

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ful find all his own — and we have seen this place, Dale, don't let's drag him over there to merely — muddy his boots," John-Giant could not help concluding.

"No bother — I've several pair," Leswing's mouth curved mockingly. "I want to please Dale Aldis."

"I see," said Dale slowly, the gray eyes looking at John-Giant with reproach for his rudeness, "we shall go to-morrow . . . to-morrow afternoon, John, and we will drive over here to pick you up."

Leswing rose with a sardonic little bow. "I'm going to scamper you off home," he said with his queer twisting of phrases; "it's time we let this young man return to mother earth — and provide the universe with more onions!"

John-Giant did not answer. He threw down his pipe and opened the door, looking at Dale with steady, dangerous eyes of suspicion. He was seeing, mentally, not only bitter loss for himself but danger, subtle, undefinable danger for the one he had learned to love.

They left to avoid a thundershower, John-Giant watching them as the car drove off and Dale waving her hand long after she ceased to see his sturdy self.

Before John-Giant's nightly moon-spoon

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call, as Leswing teasingly called it at dinner, Leswing strolled out of the gate, leaving Dale on the veranda in all her blue-and-white loveliness.

He hailed John-Giant in his approach, falling into step and saying soberly: "Is it quite fair to marry Dale?" The Cobra flashed in anger.

Having expected this John-Giant met it without hesitation. "Is n't all fair in love?" The deep-sea eyes looked at Leswing's scarred face meaningly.

"Should n't object, y' know, if it was n't about Dale's little pittance you want her to shoot overboard. Come, she can't live in a log cabin!"

"I won't take Dale's money," he answered firmly.

"Yet you will take her youth and strength and lightness of spirit — and fade her beauty and her heart with drudgery?"

John-Giant walked on without answering.

"She is only a romantic child-woman; think well, John-Giant!"

"You have it all planned, have n't you?" John finally burst out, pausing in the grassy path, his giant self seeming more burly than ever. "Dale is to fade like the woman from whom you bought your clock — that was

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cleverly done, Leswing. You won't even give me half a chance to prove my own worth. But I will! I'm not good enough for Dale — no one is — but I'm not an utter boor. I am young," he added with meaning force, "and strong and determined. You need not worry about Dale's becoming another Mrs. Abner!"

"Perhaps you cannot help it. Will the cow milk herself; the weeds pirouette away at bidding; the seed plant itself; the baking, the mending be done at night by gnomes; the children —" He paused.

John-Giant tramped ahead. "You cannot frighten me."

Leswing tapped him on the shoulder. "Wait — wait until your dreams are realities. Then no one will combat you."

The green gate was before them. They watched Dale dancing out to meet them.

"Where did you find each other?" She took John-Giant's arm. "And what were you talking about?"

"Camisoles and kings," Leswing answered. "I must tell Humphrey about packing. *Au revoir*, young things!" He turned away, humming gayly.

John settled in a moody attitude in the first armchair he came to.

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"What were you talking about?" Dale asked curiously.

"You."

"Lovely! What did you say?" Dale perched on his chair arm.

"That it is not fair to marry you — until I've made myself the — String Bean Czar." He tried to speak lightly. "Sometimes I wish you had never come back to World's End."

"I thought he understood," she said more to herself. Her arm stole round his neck.

John abruptly displaced it. "Don't, Dale, until we understand just where we're at. I don't want to go on loving you as I do — if I'm only to lose you and become a cynic."

"Silly — wasting a perfect evening over something that was settled ages past — as secure and as certain as Gibraltar!"

"Ah, but is it? I must say what I think. Do you suppose I'd care what Leswing said or what you did if I did n't love you so utterly that everything in the world hinges on it? I don't believe you know how much I care!"

"I want you to love me like that, but I don't want you to go on doubting. We'll never be happy if you do. Why, I've been planning wonderful economies all day. John, is it the silly money? Poor Mr. Leswing, he

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is overburdened with money — but he has no one's love. We can afford to give up the money, John — we are rich in better things.”

“I don't say Leswing is n't right — perhaps I ought to wait —”

“We will have O. and E. suppers every Saturday night,” she continued indignantly.

“That stands for odds and ends; and we will save our money and go to New York every winter to see good operas and plays. We can buy a wonderful dishwasher for twenty-five dollars, and a fireless cooker; and if you have electricity put in instead of buying me foolish things which I really don't want I can manage beautifully. I know I can, John-Giant.”

“Dale, you're the loveliest coxer that ever lived.” The mood was banished. “I don't quite see how it will work out, dear heart, but I love you.”

CHAPTER XII

TO the Cobra, who sulked instead of shone, the drive to Panama Rocks was of long and vile duration. Dale was the only redeeming feature, and even Dale seemed to nestle close beside John-Giant, the latter a disgruntled person who answered in monosyllables any questions and avoided Leswing's eyes.

Leaning back among the cushions, Leswing smiled enigmatically as he listened to Dale's swift chatter. He recalled the motto of an old and wise general whose life had been a series of brilliant successes, each greater than the last.

"If your enemy has no weak point — pray make one," remarked this grizzled warrior, and Leswing told himself he would lose no time in verifying the excellence of this statement.

"Glory Dimples, are you really going to make me play leap-frog all over the place?" he asked in dismay, as the car halted before Hi Backus' shack and Leswing, immaculate in white flannel and cream-colored shoes, read through his monocle the sign:

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"Panama Rox — five cent admissen! NO HUNTING ALOUD HEAR! HI BACKUS, owner."

He chuckled. "That is the really funniest thing I've happened on," he said, as he put his hand in a pocket for loose change. "Ah, this is Mr. Backus, I presume?" as the old man's face peered curiously from the doorway.

"Howdy, John Coventry? Howdy, Miss Aldis," Hi began; "you ain't going to git lost agin, air ye?"

"Here," Leswing tried to drop the money into the wrinkled hands.

"Hold on, son — 't ain't but a nickel — I ain't no beggar," Hi protested imperiously.

Leswing had strolled ahead. "He's a filthy old wretch, is n't he?" he said to Dale, "as bad as a Chinese beggar. . . . I would n't want to touch the money again — tell him to use it for a missionary offering."

"This was to be my treat," began John-Giant coming up from behind, confused and ill at ease, "here's the money — the old man is proud, you know — a nickel is all he will accept —" he held out the despised money, a dollar or so.

Leswing viewed it cynically. "I don't need it at present — give it to the endowment fund for decayed sea captains in Switzerland," he walked ahead.

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"Give it to me, you two sillies," Dale scented trouble. "There!" and she tied the coins in her little lace handkerchief. "Now John-Giant, and Philip Leswing, I shall spend it for what I choose, and don't let's spoil a wonderful afternoon by quarreling."

Leswing smiled approval — John-Giant attempted the same but failed. He felt infinitely cheap for having made the fuss about it — so did Leswing, but being older and wiser, he knew how to conceal the fact.

"Ah, and so these are the Rocks of Panama," he began, adjusting his monocle as he peered downwards. They suddenly seemed most uninteresting and horrid to Dale, their glamour was entirely gone — and she wondered why! A little picnic group that they found sitting under a tree at lunch were horribly bucolic and impossible — their hard-boiled egg-shells and crusts from sandwiches were unpleasantly strewn about, and she watched the way in which they stared at Leswing, sauntering past and swinging his shiny swagger stick.

"If you don't want to go further," began John-Giant, — "Dale — wait — I must carry you over here — don't you remember?"

Leswing awkwardly made the leap — it was an effort and his face grew a bit purplish.

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Dale could not repress a triumphant little laugh as John-Giant set her down on the other side of the ravine, fairly swinging her in his strong arms as he did so.

"Ah," murmured Leswing, "are there no steps?"

"Oh, no," the incident seemed to give John-Giant his old courage and daring — and he smiled at Dale unaffectedly. "Hi would n't hear of anything's being touched. The old boy was quite right, too — it is better as it is — here — we turn down and walk across —"

He was smiling good-naturedly at Leswing's futile attempts to descend the rocky flight of stone steps with the same grace he used to cross a drawing-room floor! It was amusing, and even Dale wrinkled up her nose in a funny little *moue* as she watched, John-Giant walking so easily and holding her hands.

At the base of the steps Leswing was obliged to pull out a silk handkerchief to mop his face. "Quite — quite a jaunt," he said; "I'm afraid I shall begin to sound thirsty if there are many more."

"Oh, there are — nearly a hundred," Dale skipped about on the mossy ground and tested the echo possibilities. "Then we have to come up again!"

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Leswing's eyes flickered. He sat gingerly on a rocky ledge. "Where are the caves?"

"Here are some — there is the bridal bower — here is lovers' lane — it leads into the shrine — rather steep, I carry Dale because it would hurt her feet." John-Giant, quite himself, lifted Dale in his arms to march ahead while Leswing lagged behind, annoyed that a country bumpkin could have wedged him into such an awkward position — and yet seeing the humor of it — and the lovely youth of Dale which enabled her to flit here and there and grow neither red of face nor short of breath.

"Ah," he said again, as he came to the end, "quite — quite a jaunt."

"I'm afraid you've hurt your shoes," John-Giant could not refrain from adding, his own brown leather boots were such a striking contrast to the cream-colored kid affairs which Leswing wore — but which were cut and muddied beyond repair.

"Don't mention it — I've a dozen pair," he answered lightly, the Cobra growing positively dangerous in its sparkle. If John-Giant was making a weak point in his enemy's plan of action, Leswing would see that he replied in like measure. If only he could escape from this wretched country mudhole

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— with a few cheap rocks sticking up at angles and curious natives eating corn fritters and kissing loudly as they passed through the silly little caverns! Anything but Dale's gray eyes, mischievous and amused — and adoring as they watched Brute Strength clad in a linen suit making its progress easily; no wonder Brute Strength did so, he had spent his life in taking native belles through the Panama Rocks!

He was about to turn back in earnest when Dale interrupted.

"Now that we've rested, let's hurry — there is so much to see and you must sit in the wishing-chair."

"My dear child, I refuse — I am positive my wishes can come true without doing so."

"Please," she put her hands on his shoulders and gave him the least bit of a shake. "For me," she insisted.

"I'll appoint you my representative," he parried.

"Oh, but I did — so did John-Giant, and it would spoil it to repeat — would n't it?"

"I see; well, haste to the wishing-chair. Frankly, the only possibilities I see in this place are mud and rheumatism." Leswing's irritability was beginning to assert itself — ahead stretched nothing but beastly rock

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and mossy, slippery ground and more detestable little steps leading down into nowhere. "I took pity on the blacks and had stairways built at Paradisio — but I never ventured down them!"

"Then we will excuse you — as soon as you sit in the wishing-chair," said Dale patronizingly; "after all, I was thoughtless to make you come — but you seemed to be so young — on the veranda," she added innocently.

John-Giant came up to put his arm on hers. He was all smiles.

Leswing's grizzled head tilted itself ever so slightly. "Oh, don't bother about me — I've had many a harder time than this — lion and tiger hunting. Only I'm not dressed properly — and it seems a bit stupid," then he strode ahead with determination.

"Is this the way to the wishing-chair?" he asked, his face a composite of irritation and amusement. Leswing's sense of humor always saved him.

"Right ahead," John-Giant directed cheerfully, "now don't turn —" and then he put his arm around Dale and they deliberately lagged behind to steal a kiss and laugh and put their heads together for a quick, lovely second.

"You're so nice — and strong, John-Gi-

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ant," Dale murmured, "poor Mr. Leswing — it was n't fair, was it?"

"I don't know," said John-Giant indifferently, "I'm thinking how beautiful you look, Dale; you grow a little lovelier every day —"

"Did you tell him straight ahead?" she asked presently, looking up with an anxious expression. There was no white-flannel clad figure going on at a martyred gait.

"Yes, he can't miss us," John-Giant peered down the narrow path, overshadowed on either side by the rocks. It was damp and chilly even on the hot summer's day. He noted Dale had no outer wrap. "You need my coat, dearest," he insisted; "please, Dale, you'll look just as lovely as you do in white mull," and he wrapped the coat around her, kissing her as his reward for chivalry.

"Please find him — I'm worried. He didn't go straight ahead — how horrid it would be if he were lost. It is a very scary sort of place to be lost in — those caves fairly flooded with darkness. . . . Here — here we are — he ought to be here — John-Giant, where on earth has he gone?"

"Hal-lo-o-o—" John's voice went rumbling down the glen.

No answer came, no sign of the jaunty, white-clad figure with muddied boots and a protesting swagger stick.

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"Hal-lo-o-o—" Dale's voice joined his.

No answer.

The young people looked at each other in dismay — almost guilt.

"We must get old Hi," began Dale.

"He does n't know half the places — he's too old to climb if he did," John-Giant told her, "don't worry, dearest — just sit here and wait and promise me solemnly that no matter how competent you think you are to explore the place, you won't go trying it — or to find him. Wait right here — or I'll have two people to find instead of one."

"Do you think he has fallen off the rocks?" she whispered.

"Not a chance for it — he has merely lost the path — we ought to have kept up with him."

"I suppose it is my fault — first, because I made him come, and, second, because I made you wait and kiss me;" and she smiled, even though Leswing was utterly "mislaid."

John-Giant kissed her again. "Promise you won't stir — and I'll promise to find him." His big self went plunging away into the narrow rock ravines while Dale listened to his last halloo and then smiled in happy contemplation of John-Giant's splendidness.

Poor Mr. Leswing — "mud and rheumatism" was all he saw in the rocks, while Dale

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and John-Giant had found love and romance and inspiration, all sorts of wonderful things, and had carried them away in their hearts forever and a day. It was good to be young — it was sad to grow old — and not have love as a comforting crutch. Cheated out of life itself, Dale told herself as she waited. Poor Mr. Leswing . . . no wonder he let his blacks have the twenty-five acres of wonderful rock formation . . . if he always cut his shoes and grew so short of breath when he attempted to survey them!

Of course John-Giant would find him, there was no doubt as to that — and then Mr. Leswing would realize what a wonderful sort he was — and that all the gold monocles and white flannels in the world counted for naught when one lacks strength, the strength of youth — and the corresponding whiteness of heart! She must see that John-Giant had at least two silk shirts — she would do monograms on the sleeves — as a surprise — and knit ties to match — and she would also make a practice of balancing her accounts every week. If she did n't she would grow all confused and spend more than she ought. For instance, here she had her week's allowance — and she spread out the lace handkerchief containing the disputed and rejected

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money! She would pretend each coin was a dollar and portion it out for various expenses — and see how she could manage. She grew so excited over the game that she paid no heed to time — John-Giant had given her his promise and that was enough. She had the coins in piles and was trying to economize here and there and praising herself when she managed to put one on the pile she had named “bank.” John-Giant had told her they must save — always — even when he was Duke of Endive!

Finally she stood up and looked down the narrow pathway calling loudly. Too much time had elapsed to fulfill John-Giant’s assurance that everything was all right. Suppose John-Giant had tumbled from a mossy ledge — down two hundred feet or so. She forgot Leswing! He did not matter — it was John-Giant, brave and big and strong, about whom she cared. She hated Leswing with a childish outburst of feeling — why did he bother to come here in unsuitable walking-shoes, saying nasty little slams and losing his way? She started to break her promise and to go find John-Giant — then she made herself obey. It was her fault, after all — she had insisted on coming, neither John-Giant nor Leswing wanted it! If anything happened to John-Giant it would be — her — fault —

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The tears rolled down her cheeks unchecked and the money lay neglected. "John-Giant — dearest," she began to call hysterically — then like a sound of a heavenly reassurance came John-Giant's brave:

"Hullo, Dale — hullo —"

Running in the direction of the sound she met him in the narrow path, his face muddy and his hair rumpled; his hat must have been lost and one of his hands was slightly cut.

"Did you worry, darling?"

"Not until just now — I made myself play a game," she said, kissing him; "your hand is hurt — oh, yes — where was he?"

"Jolly good thing I went, he was lost in a cave — just a side turn — he thought he was ploughing straight ahead but instead he kept on in the cave and lost himself — I had to drag him out." There was the least bit of scorn in the last remark.

"And you are safe," Dale did not bother as to Leswing.

"Of course — I left him waiting at the Rock of Ages; he'll have to be boosted up the steps," and then they both laughed — rejoicing over their own beautiful young selves and romantic hearts and kissing each other endlessly, John-Giant telling Dale she was lovely and Dale

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telling John-Giant he was wonderful and that she loved him twice as hard because — oh, just because — and finally, these very self-centered young creatures came to where Leswing waited. He was a frousled Leswing, also hatless, his shoes bursted in several places and muddied from head to foot, shivering from the damp of the cave and the shock and trying to be debonair and quite the old Leswing as he rose to welcome them. His monocle was broken, but the black silk cord served to steady and conceal his trembling fingers as he said:

“Quite an adventure, Dale-dear — your John-Giant is as splendid as any St. Bernard who ever rescued a snow-buried traveler in the Alps.” His eyes were very black and angry, and the Cobra blinked naught but the warning: “If your enemy has no weak point — pray make one!”

“I was afraid John-Giant was lost,” said Dale with frank selfishness.

Leswing’s eyebrows uplifted. “Oh, no, he’s used to this sort of thing — you should have seen the way in which he lifted me into daylight — quite famously. My boy, if you ever decide to follow a new occupation — do try being a bath attendant! You could handle us like infants, I assure you.”

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Whereupon Dale looked at John-Giant in indignation and John-Giant's face darkened somewhat and his voice became a growl.

"It was fortunate he could find you," Dale said pointedly, "a night in the cave would not have been exactly — bracing."

"Oh, I shall have a medal struck off instanter," Leswing added, as he toiled up the steps, conscious of his ridiculous appearance.

"Don't mention it," John-Giant growled.

Dale paused to laugh. "I just remembered — in all this confusion, that I left the money — the disputed entrance money back there on the ledge. I was playing housekeeping and bank with it while I waited —"

"I told you I would not have it," Leswing had reached the top of the steps. "I always have my own way — eventually."

When they reached World's End and Glenny — who was indignant to the last ounce that her idol should have been so treated, while Humphrey set to work to "restore the antique," as Leswing laughingly said, — John-Giant and Dale lingered below as they said good-by.

"Just think," said Dale softly, "he owes his life to you!"

"I did n't do it for him — but for Dale Aldis."

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"That means two good stars in your crown — to do a good thing against one's inclination! Don't dislike him, John-Giant; he's nothing to look forward to — you have everything."

"But those who have nothing to look forward to often turn desperate — and steal," said the boy.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know," he evaded, "only I wonder how game Leswing would be — if he would 'take his death' like a well-blooded dog. I mean, if it came to a show-down of something big and vital — would he be game enough to stand by and see a bargain true — or would he cheat?"

"Was he game when you found him?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes," it was an effort to admit it, "as game as I ever saw. And he really was lost, Dale — it is no joke to be lost at the rocks. When I finally located him, he said, out of the utter, chilly darkness, 'Well, here I am, like the bad penny — bound to turn up. Awful sorry to make a bother.' And he was game. . . . I could not help thinking of something, Dale — it may be silly — but I could not help it . . . don't tell him, please — will you promise?"

"Of course I promise."

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"The reason I found Leswing was because of the time of which I told you — when I explored on a bet and found a skeleton lying in the cave — remember?"

"Oh — yes —" she said softly, drawing in her breath.

"I halfway suspected he had gotten into the same trap. And when I dragged him out — in his white suit and grizzled hair, his face as pale as your dress and the little smirking cane in his white hands — I could not help but think he was — somehow — I don't just know as yet — like the skeleton — dead in a certain sense of the word! That it was more than just a co-incidence."

"Strange!" Dale was shivering.

"And the other odd thing about it is this — that people who came to see the skeleton said it was not an accidental death, but that an Indian had evidently been voted as a bad man and walled up there to die by starvation — the things found with him indicated it — and there were fragments of other skeletons further back — as if it was a customary punishment place . . . you see the stones with which they used to wall them in were not immovable — and time and storms had dislodged them and so I made my entrance. Afterwards we cleared them all away and

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Leswing could walk right in — not understanding . . . it struck me as odd.”

“A bad man — walled up to die — and he said he would never leave Paradisio — how terrible! and how very odd that Mr. Leswing should deviate from an apparently straight path and be lost — in the identical spot!”

They were both silent. Then she asked:

“And has no one else ever been lost there?”

“No one.”

“It is — very strange,” was all she answered.

Leswing dined in his room that evening and then sent word asking if Dale would drop in to see him.

She went up to find him quite the immaculate and fascinating Leswing, in a wonderful mandarin coat, stiff with gold, and a great green-embroidered dragon forming the pattern. He was smoking his cigarette and sipping a glass of claret as he glanced over some exquisite porcelain miniatures which he wanted to give her, if she cared enough to bother with them!

“You are like a scene from a fairy tale,” she said lightly, sitting opposite to admire. “I never knew there could be such a wonderful mandarin coat in the world.” It seemed

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impossible this was the same frayed individual who had to be helped into the machine at Panama Rocks.

"Because this is an enchanted mandarin coat," he assured her in the same happy vein. "Be careful, Dale — this dragon is my pal in disguise — if I ever want him to do anything — like kill an enemy or build a seven-towered castle in the twinkling of an eye, he climbs right down out of the pattern and becomes a fiery-tongued, wild-eyed old boy — he does the task — we have a word or two — and then he climbs back and becomes the nice silk embroidered creature you now see." Leswing's eyes twinkled. "Whoever pats him — he is bound to act for them as well."

Dale's fingers touched the head. "I 've won a slave — and you do feel perfectly all right?" she asked solicitously.

"My dear infant, think no more of it — why, when I was in Algiers — " and he drifted into fascinating semi-true tales of adventure and romance which held Dale spellbound — then he told her the histories of the porcelain miniatures, rare, beautiful things and priceless, besides — and gave her two queer little vials of rare scent to use if she liked and a cobwebby lace collar he had picked up in Gibraltar. Then he talked to her of art and

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music and many wonderfully beautiful things which opened before her untried self a bewitching world of which she was ignorant. The Panama Rocks assumed the same ridiculous proportions they had before John-Giant found him, and Leswing became the baffling, super-person, half good fairy and half-mocking imp — and wholly attractive!

"I don't know why you bother with me so much," she said rather humbly as they came to a lull in conversations. "I've been a great deal of bother to you, have n't I?"

"You have been a rare pleasure. My child, you are no customary young thing with a fazzer and a muzzer and a green plush parlor," he insisted cleverly, "but a young girl with the soul of a sprite and a woman intermingled and the consequent attraction for anyone permitted to know you . . . don't ever let anyone tell you that you are commonplace or fitted for ordinary drudgery, Dale. Nor ever let yourself stay in such an environment — your soul would wilt and your heart die! I know whereof I speak."

"Yet John-Giant cannot give me the unusual," his love seemed to steal over her like a protecting armor.

"Ah!" the Cobra blinked brightly; it, too, was quite itself. "However, if you marry

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John-Giant, that is not in my hands. I might wish to change or soften things, but I could not," here he smiled, — "any more than the warm-hearted hen who would like to be obliging and lay a hard-boiled egg — but really can't! Now I have talked you tired, — have n't I, my little girl? — so good night — and rosy, mother-of-pearl dreams, Dale Aldis — and remember you are the most wonderful sprite-woman I have ever known."

He rose and held the door open for her, his mandarin coat with its guarding green dragon seeming like a wonderful screen of fantasy which shut out the drab, workaday world.

Dale hesitated. "I shall never see you again, perhaps — but I shall remember everything you have said — always remember."

"I am flattered," he spoke sincerely and she recognized the tone. "Your mother was very lovely and your father my boyish ideal — but you have a place in my heart quite your own."

"If only they could have been right," she said appealingly; "tell me — with all your queer ideas — and rich fantasies — and cleverness — tell me — would it not have been better?"

"It is always better to have things right," his tone was so tender that she came towards

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him and reached out her hand. "Wicked Man of the World that I am — with a past and a present — *but no future* — I stand with you in what you say. Boy that I was, I told your father so. And because it is right — although not for stupid reasons of such as live in Amherst — I am glad it is to be right for you."

"You are wonderful," she said, with the admiration of a child. "I was afraid of your answer, afraid you might twist up ethics as you do all else."

"I would and do — except for you — so perhaps I'm not as wonderful as you think me. It is you who are wonderful — and I reflect it — do you see?"

Before she realized he had kissed her gently on the forehead and had closed the door.

CHAPTER XIII

DALE fancied Leswing's departure would be a relief since she need no longer be on parade. But World's End seemed suddenly monotonous and the hours between John-Giant's visits entirely dreary and filled with strange wishes.

"I christen you the Dean of Giftology," she wrote to him a few days later. "Your surprise box came this morning and I have played peacock all day!"

The surprise box was not shown to John. Already there had come to Dale the realization that if one acted a delighted child because of such a box one was apt to come a cropper, especially if one's audience was a black haired, deep-sea-eyed young man altogether ardent.

She played with the creamy lace mantilla, the fan of faint yellow plumes and the bottle of scent, dipping into the glacé chestnuts which she found in a satin box, as she read one of the new novels. She forgot the O. and E. suppers she was to cook for John, and the dishwasher and the electrical efficiency.

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When John came the glacé chestnuts had given her a headache and the synthetic perfume made her languid — she wanted to keep the creamy lace round her, she missed its clinging silkiness and she was interested in the adventures of a new-style heroine. Altogether she was a lack luster Dale who listened about the bug enemies of his truck farm and the way the Laird of McNab chewed fence posts.

The next morning brought a flowergram — a vase of crystal in which the potter had caught a faintly tinged flood of sunlight, was crowded with orchids of red and spotted black. Leswing had written on a card: "From one villain to another!"

The idea pleased Dale; she began to feel an interest in exotic things. The florist's outer wrappings were of newspaper. It may or may not have been accidental, but the sheet of the New York paper contained an enthusiastic column interview with Philip Leswing, the diamond king and owner of Paradisio the magnificent! — in which it set forth his virtues and achievements and days as a young wag in London in nothing but superlative praise.

Dale cut the column out and read it carefully, looking at the orchids and playing with the tassels of the lace mantilla. After all,

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Leswing had achieved a great deal; he was what the world calls worth while. Because he was extravagant and apparently without morals was no sign he was to be condemned. Dale's logic wobbled about here — she could not finish her defense, she merely knew the newspaper cut of him was an insult and that she wished to sit on the terrace at Paradisio while the lions sunned themselves and the sea boomed beneath.

Leswing wrote to her the following day, inclosing an enticing concert program. It was a frank letter such as men write each other — the sort to win a girl's heart, since all young girls like to be considered comrades. It contained nothing sentimental or admonishing regarding John, but said that he had picked up a good collar for Trig and would send it if he did not return.

Dale's heart fluttered as she read this — if he did not return! It was just as likely that he would sail without seeing her again as that he would visit World's End, to be bored and inconvenienced.

She wrote immediately that Trig needed a collar, his was curled up at the ends; and she hoped Leswing would come to World's End — she wanted to see him. She posted the letter herself, wishing as she did so that the

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scarlet car was waiting to take her for a spin.

Curling up on the chaise longue Dale re-read the letter. She began to find excuses for Leswing — for his years of gayety, for the scarred cheek. He became a fairy-book hero as well as the Dean of Giftology. Her own awkwardness grew upon her — the questions she had asked, her sweeping assertion that she wished no more money, she was to marry John-Giant. . . . Of course he thought it foolish to marry a John-Giant. Not that she loved him any the less — merely that she was beginning to see the other side. Trig snored as if his soul were annoyed by bad dreams, and Dale rose impatiently and went to the piano to play the love song which Leswing first applauded.

The gifts were never lavish or overdone — the day there was no gift there was a letter or fresh flowers. The days there were none of these Dale moped noticeably and walked to the post office a ridiculous number of times.

John was busy with new ventures. With Dale as inspiration he had developed a better market and was considering the purchase of a hundred acres with which to begin his cattle venture. He was distraught and tired of an evening and sometimes merely came to the door at World's End to say he could not

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stay — would she please kiss him good night and tell him she understood? Of course it was splendid that John-Giant was really beginning to do things — and of course it was all for Dale and sometime he would stop being under such a strain and so fagged. She scolded herself for feeling impatient or neglected. But the crossing of midchannel became a real, rather terrifying prospect, even though she was still safe in the harbor at World's End with Leswing playing a delightful fairy godfather!

Another month of delightful surprises and comrade notes trained Dale to expect novelty. She had acquired the desire for it as one does for drink, not surfeited and sickened with an oversupply at the outset and thus led into rigid declarations of abstinence. Leswing knew the wisdom of gradual change even as John-Giant claimed the bombastic victory of youth.

The summer frocks were faded — rowing in an old-style flat-bottomed boat, tramping in the woods, wrought havoc with the lacy things. The nuns had merely dressed her for the summer; they left her future in a vague state of indecision — and her wardrobe equally limited.

The last of September brought a warning coolishness forbidding the veranda as a siesta

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spot. The little island was shriveled, and strange winds tore across the graves of the pets. From now until buds burst from bare tree limbs Dale must reconcile herself to the interior of the green villa — unless she marry John-Giant and share his cabin. Isolation of a different sort would then confront her.

Dale realized this on murky days which brought no letter from Leswing. She had come to wonder why he stayed in America, writing her from a New York club; then Washington; wandering to California to look up an old friend and darting back to the coast dangerously near sailing vessels.

Winter was coming, and faded frocks, and the wind teasing the shaking walls, and John Giant busier than ever — even if things were “breaking big” as he said. For recreation she coaxed Glenny to let her go into the kitchen to cook, only to be found in tears and a tangle of pots an hour later, quite helpless as to why it burned and acted queerly.

Dale had been thankful to escape to her room and slip on a mandarin coat, another gift of Leswing's, lying down and rejoicing that Glenny's capable self could bring order from chaos and a burnt pot roast. John-Giant said he liked pot roast. Dale intended asking him for dinner and mysteriously in-

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forming him that the new chef had cooked what was set before him. John-Giant was never asked for dinner because the new chef had dissolved in tears at a burnt finger and a weariness in her back which came from encounters with obstinate stove lids. She wondered how it would seem, during this mid-channel, when John-Giant came home hungry and tired, and worried perhaps, and found naught but a burnt mess on a bespattered stove! There would be a great deal of baking and cooking. And he would not let her keep the money because it would rob him of self-respect and make him a puppet. There would be plenty of money if she would only wait. . . . But perhaps when that time came she would be hopelessly unable to enjoy it.

Then strong arms tenderly holding her, deep-sea eyes with adoration looking into hers, and that dark face reverently touching her cheek while John-Giant kissed her, murmuring "Dale, dearest —"

The phantom of distrust fled. After all John-Giant was John-Giant — and a fig for trifles! Glenny had made the kitchen spotless and was browning a fresh roast!

Dale slipped downstairs to answer the bell and found that Leswing in an irresistible special-delivery letter ordered her to New

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York. He had a chaperon, a Mrs. Sarah Darling-Wicks, who would take charge of her and conduct her fall shopping. Mrs. Wicks had an apartment at which she was to stay, and Leswing would show her about if she chose. Glenny must pack her things and get her off as soon as possible, and she could tell John-Giant not to growl or else she would bring him no seven-league boots.

The day suddenly became a clear, golden thing, worthy of October's brightest efforts. Leswing had sent for her — to do fall shopping and buy John-Giant seven-league boots! Oh, what did pot roasts matter!

"My precious lamb," said Glenny in a state of rapture, "tell me what you'll 'ave and I'll set about your boxes himmejite!"

"The mantilla, Glenny, and the serge for traveling, and the gray chiffon — after you mend it — and all the other things, you understand. Do hurry, Glenny! I'm as excited as if I were going to be married!" Dale was dancing about like a child before a Christmas tree.

"I'm going to see John-Giant now — it's his dinner time. I'll send the wire on my way; I can make the train to-night. Hurry, Glenny, there's an angel!"

"E's managin' clever," Glenny told her-

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self; "savin' of my lamb from such a fate!" And in her excitement she packed her own hat, a black plateau of crêpe with a sole bluish geranium struggling for life in its center.

Dale danced on to the cabin. She found John-Giant among a mannish débris of unwashed dishes betraying evidence of pork, potatoes, and pie! He was also counting coins from the depths of a burlap sack.

"Why not warn a chap?" he began, almost displeased that she should find him so. "I admit we are the unconventional of the countryside, but I call this storming the fort. I'd have had my hair brushed and the dishes shoved under cover."

"I shall have to wash the dishes every day and see you very often with your hair rumpled," she reminded him, "so what's the difference? And what in the world are you doing — counting treasure? It looks like a Sunday-school's effort toward rescuing the heathen."

He swept the money back into the bag. "A secret," he said, smiling. "You've pounced on my one secret. I call it a shame you don't let me have just one."

"Tell me!" she insisted, something rising in protest within her the moment she heard him suggest such a thing. She could not bear

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not to share every thought — though she was somewhat reticent about crystal vases and lace scarfs.

“It is my nest egg for granny’s marker,” he said soberly. “She never wanted one. ‘Plant a big tree for me,’ she said — and I did. But I want a marker, too; she had a plain, good name — Mary Smith Tuddicombe — and I want it on a granite base raised about so high.” He indicated with his hands against the bookcase. “Of course it can wait until all the other things are started — but I drop in stray coins here as a reminder. Eighty-five dollars will be the cost. There, is it such a bad secret, Dale? What makes you look so happy — and won’t you do me the honor to embrace me?”

“You’re too good, John-Giant,” she said as she met his eager lips. “Please let me help too — she’s mine as well as yours.” The vision of Leswing, fairy godfather, became dim. John-Giant seemed paramount, invincible; Leswing a pleasant, almost dutiful affair which would soon be ended. She no longer dreaded telling.

“I must say good-by for a very little, dearest. Mr. Leswing wants me to come to New York. He has engaged a chaperon and I’m to do my fall shopping. If I’m to be a poor

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man's wife I may never have such an opportunity —"

"I planned we'd go together," the boy said drearily. "You said so too!"

The pile of coins for the market, the unwashed dishes, the cabin — all combined into a hopeless tangle. Dale's elegant little self saying brittle vows made his lips fold into a thin, ugly line.

"I won't be more than a week — or two. Then I'll have settled the old money question and we'll close World's End and be married. Yes, John-Giant, we will be married. Why wait? Don't resent my seeing Mr. Leswing — he will go back to Africa; I'll probably never see him again. Don't you understand?"

"I'm not arguing," he said in the same dreary tone.

"I'll buy you a surprise."

"Don't bother!" John walked to the fireplace to kick a smoldering log.

"John! Why can't you say you're glad I'm going and you'll be gladder I'm coming back? Won't you marry me as soon as ever I do?" She danced across the room holding out her arm.

"We won't have any of the improvements — I've undertaken the debt for the land. Besides," he added grimly, "he'll talk you

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out of it. I know his methods. His sort always do that kind of thing. If he'd come into the open and let me wrestle him I'd win soon enough — but he fences indoors."

Dale's eyes were horrified gray pools. "You're jealous of Mr. Leswing!" she cried. "You impolite, unfair person — poor Mr. Leswing, who is ages older than I and who loathes women."

He laughed harshly. "Wait!" was all he would say.

"I shan't kiss you good-by!" Dale picked up her walking stick.

John-Giant caught her roughly in his arms. "You will! You came into my life after I dreamed of you for years — you forced yourself to become a reality. It was you, not I, who did the first wooing. Forgive me if that sounds wrong — but it is the truth. And you can't go away so easily. You are mine — mine — mine!" His lips touched hers roughly; she struggled a little and then lay contentedly in his strong grasp. "Say you're not mine if you can — ah, you can't! No one else shall ever kiss you like that, Dale — you are mine! Money and power and a life of questionable experience and all the rest of the stuff men lean on when youth deserts — can't win against love — real love — first love!"

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"I shall always belong to you, John-Giant," she said a moment later; "no matter what. My body and my heart are yours."

"The union of a body and a heart signifies a soul, Dale. There is not much left for anyone else, is there?"

"Nothing — and when I come home we will be married."

He dropped on his knees; it seemed a natural gesture. To one more sophisticated it would have been studied.

"I'll pray every minute that you're away to have you come back to me. I've been a jealous cad to have said all I did. I want you to see all the things I can't show you just yet. I will show you all those things some day, Dale. Just be good enough to wait — and come back soon."

"When I do come back promise me we'll be married," she repeated, "without any more questionings and delays. Promise, John! Say it after me — we will be married."

"If I live and you don't change," he whispered.

CHAPTER XIV

DALE'S first impression of Mrs. Sarah Darling-Wicks was endless black silk and jet ornaments on the point of disruption. She had a thin, clever face with deeply set black eyes and gray hair molded into an ambitious pompadour. She spoke with an unfamiliar drawl and accompanied Leswing at the station when Dale arrived.

"My dear child," she began, languidly polite, "are you a wreck? Trains always leave me a wreck. I hope you will love me — that is all I ever ask of anyone." She pressed an embroidered handkerchief to her eyes as if the gesture always accompanied the remark. Later Dale found that it did.

Dale nodded. After hours on the train she felt she could love anyone who would lead her to a comfortable apartment.

Leswing was watching the scene with amusement. "Glory-Dimples looks hungry, and there's a smudge on her Grecian nose. I've asked Mrs. Wicks to widen her apartment to take you under her wing. You'll find a maid and some things to wear. I'll come up

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later and we'll dine out. I've some friends who are anxious to meet you."

That was all he said. He made no offer even to take her hand. Dale told herself that John's fears were identical with a hysterical woman's. Leswing in his irreproachable afternoon dress, his monocle dangling somewhere off his left shoulder, the distinguished grizzled head leading the way through the crowd, inspired Dale with awe. She suddenly felt herself to be utterly crude. In World's End she was a strange creature in a properly strange place, with frocks designed on nunnish ideas of the world. But New York, with its noises beating in on all sides, succeeded in confusing her even more than Leswing had anticipated.

She found him opening the cab door and Mrs. Wicks helping her in by dint of her left little-finger tip.

"Good-by!" Leswing nodded jovially. "I'll be up at seven." And before Dale could answer he had lost himself in the crowd.

Mrs. Wicks turned solicitously toward her new charge. "My dear, of all the young ladies I have taken under my wing — God never sent me any children, more's the pity — I think you are the most interesting, and have the brightest prospects." This was also

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a trade speech. Dale felt the mechanical ease with which it was delivered.

"Ah," she murmured, turning her young, tired face to watch the crowds.

"My dear girl, you don't realize your own beauty — you have sadly neglected it. That was what Mr. Leswing said. Dear Mr. Leswing, what a wonder he is! Such generosity, such good taste, such nobility of character and broadness of outlook — such good looks! I am quite bewitched myself." She flicked the handkerchief across her twinkling, shrewd eyes.

"Are n't you very fond of him?" she continued.

Dale nodded. She was fascinated by mere crowds, incapable of estimating individuals at the present moment.

"He selected everything for you — you don't know how proud he is of your beauty. You've a friend in Mr. Leswing as sincere as a parent."

"What am I to do here?" Dale forced herself to be polite.

"What Mr. Leswing says. Mr. Leswing's judgment is beyond reproach. He is welcomed by the very best people in the world — think what an opportunity to broaden one's mind! Have you seen what the papers say of him?"

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Dale gave another boyish nod. She was wondering if John-Giant had gotten his supper and was going to do his lesson in the correspondence course or would he write her first? She told him to send his letters in care of Leswing's club.

"Like all noblemen he shuns attention," Mrs. Wicks drawled. "I presume you have heard of the Rumanian princess who was determined to be his bride?"

Dale listened with vague interest. Crowds still interested her. Then the cab stopped before an apartment house and Dale found herself being led into an ultrafashionable living room and told to feel that this was her home as long as she chose to stay.

"Take off your things and let me really see you." Mrs. Wicks rang the bell and a smart French maid appeared, staring like a china doll.

"This is Toinette," explained Mrs. Wicks. "Mr. Leswing has arranged for her. She will do everything you wish."

Dale followed them into her rooms, smart affairs in blue and white, with a number of hatboxes and frocks laid on the bed and chairs. Red roses greeted her, as did a satin bonbon box and some books. By experience she knew who had sent them.

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"I told you what Miss Aldis would wear this evening," Mrs. Wicks told Toinette. "She is to be ready by seven. My sweet child, what skin and eyes — and hair! Toinette can work marvels with it. Thank fortune you are not stout. The last charge I had was a Chilean heiress weighing over a hundred and eighty. Poor thing, she was so mortified every time she looked in the glass. But not half so much as I was. I'm going to run off now to get forty winks. If I don't my head will ache — and we've such a brilliant evening before us. Toinette will bring you milk or whatever you wish. My advice is to take milk; it never injures the complexion."

"Black coffee," remarked Dale grimly as the door closed.

With an admiring glance Toinette departed.

Dale wandered amid the array of hat-boxes. She peeked into one — a white feather toque with brilliant buckles lay inside; another contained a three-cornered riding hat with smart, glazed ribbon; a little velvet bonnet with ermine bands was a third. The gowns were different from those the nuns had bought for her; they were not a girl's but a woman's whose position demanded that she dress to emphasize her individual charm and general

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luxurious existence. An untrimmed, biscuit-colored broadcloth with a seal stole caught her fancy. There were white tricoline breeches and a greenish-gray tweed coat and russet boots in evidence. Leswing must intend her to ride. And the orange velvet with silvery lace of which he had spoken lay among sheets of scented tissue.

Toinette returned with the service of black coffee and indigestible, delicious little cakes. Dale slipped out of her traveling gown and poured a cup. Taking her fountain pen and some of Mrs. Wick's emblazoned notepaper she scribbled:

"Dear John-Giant: New York is very wonderful. I have just ridden up from the depots. Mrs. Wicks is a queer person. I think she enjoys her salary most of all. Mr. Leswing barely spoke to me; he is very busy here and is being rushed by everyone. We are going out to dinner — I don't know where.

"Mrs. Wicks' apartment is all gold and coral, and everything is so glazed that you think it has been newly varnished. I have a French maid, Toinette, who would adore looking over my shoulder to see what I am writing — but she cannot, for I have set her to work getting my things ready.

"I will write you every blessed day, and you do the same. I am terribly homesick for you, John-Giant. Just think how many miles I am away — traveling all night long and most of to-day. I wish we were married and were sitting before the fireplace planning things —

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don't you? Please wear a muffler if the weather turns sharp or you will have a bad throat, like you said you did last winter. I must stop — Toinette approaches. Be sure to go see Glenny and tell her I will write as soon as I have time. Eight kisses, John, and then eight more.

“DALE.”

She sealed and addressed the envelope, placing it on the desk so Toinette, by dint of an extra twist, could read: “Mr. John Coventry, Orchard Lodge.”

Toinette pursed her lips in pleased fashion. Mrs. Wicks' usual charges were dullards whom Mrs. Wicks was to steer into some matrimonial harbor. This slim, pale girl who ordered black coffee defiantly and wrote immediately to a Mr. John Coventry was worthy of close attention.

At seven o'clock Toinette presented Dale for approval. Mrs. Wicks, in a still more rustling black silk and an entirely fresh regiment of beads, went into ecstasies.

“My dear — a charming work of art — ravishing, superb. Kiss me! Just love me, Dale, that is all I ever ask of anyone. Love me — and be kind to dear Mr. Leswing, who is so proud of you. I want you to see this bracelet that my last charge gave me. All my girls leave me with souvenirs. I love to

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look at them and recall the dear times we had together. Some of the souvenirs are extremely beautiful. I will show you them in the morning." Tactfully implanting the hint Mrs. Wicks sent Dale into the drawing-room to wait for Leswing.

The drawing-room afforded Dale much amusement. She was picturing John-Giant in his usual working clothes trying to entertain Mrs. Wicks tête-à-tête, and imagining the débris of overturned vases and chairs, marble cupids and rumpled rugs.

"Share the joke!" said Leswing from the doorway.

She turned, smiling radiantly.

"Why, Glory-Dimples is a woman!" He took her hands in his, kissing them, foreign fashion. Dale felt amused — and a trifle impressed. John-Giant had often kissed her hands, but not formally!

Dale's dinner frock was inspired by a century-old Japanese tapestry, a thing of faded blue and silver, and round her well-dressed hair was an audacious band of peacock feathers.

"I feel a fairy princess, not at all Dale Aldis, of World's End. And what excellent training toward being a farmer's wife, is n't it?"

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"Immense!" Leswing laughed with her. "Now tell me, are you glad to see me, a little bit glad? Say yes, anyway; makes a fellow feel awfully set up."

"I am — gladder than I thought I would be. You see," she added with naïve frankness, "I hated leaving John."

"To be sure! And did John-Giant growl? I can imagine him sulking in the cabin and longing to have you beside him sewing carpet rags. . . . Dale, we are going to meet some interesting people to-night. Did n't I tell you I was noted for coffee, cigarettes and celebrities? I am. There is a naughty lady novelist and a ballet dancer, a statesman, and an opera singer with whom everyone falls in love, and some clubmen, usual hangers-on. Even in America you can get up a fairly decent crowd if you try. I want you to tell me how you like them; they are quite different from everyone you have ever seen. To-morrow you and I will canter through the park. Be nice and don't make it six A.M. I'm never speakable to before brekker. Say eight and we can have a slashing time, playing anvil chorus with our friends of this evening." Leswing was lighting a cigarette and placing it in a pale-green holder. The Cobra winked a wicked smile. Leswing's grizzled, slightly

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perfumed head, his immaculate broadcloth suit, his scarred face — seemed to be strangely familiar — as if Dale had known him always.

It was not so much what Leswing said to her as what he left unsaid. The friction concerning John-Giant was apparently forgotten. Besides, the satin of the undergarments was good to her skin — little sensualist; she liked the gold-brocaded slippers, and the sparkle of her diamond ring quite vied with the Cobra. She had approved the perfumed bath; the amusing chime of bells on her boudoir door, summoning Toinette; the package of small gold-tipped cigarettes which Toinette gravely offered her and Dale as gravely accepted, making a mess of choking over one and flinging it away. She even liked the gay gold-and-coral apartment, the hum of vivid, care-free life about her, the titles of the books, the pictures, the sheets of music — everything suggesting in subtle fashion luxury and ease and love — highly spiced and unequal!

“And how do we proceed with Mrs. Darling-Wicks?”

“Nicely. All she wishes is my love — and a souvenir of our days together,” Dale told him drolly.

“She’s rather raw, but the best I could find in a hurry. That sort of woman is liable to

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get on your nerves. Don't let her bother you — she is merely a necessary evil."

Toinette appeared with a square of old-rose brocade and the little white toque. Dale obediently slipped into them, Mrs. Wicks appearing from somewhere, and presto, they were en route for dinner.

"We're going to be vulgar and dine at a hotel," said Leswing. "I knew you wanted to see what it was like; later we shall go to Durant's studio — he's giving a party."

Dale grew up that first night in New York. True, she was an apt pupil; but the process was quite as forced as making gooseberries ripen during Christmas week by dint of hot-house methods. Mrs. Wicks had long ago learned the art of effacing herself yet remaining properly up stage for Madame Grundy's lorgnette. It was as if Dale and Leswing were alone during their well-served dinner, and alone also at the theater while Dale watched her first modern drama. The nuns had inclined toward sacred tableaux!

The play held Dale spellbound. Leswing had chosen it carefully. It had to do with a society girl who knew nothing of the working world and who heroically cast her lot with the socialistic element, marrying a working-man to prove the strength of her argument.

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In the last-act she comes back to her own — and the dress-suit hero who has sat neglected in his steam yacht during the first three acts.

Dale scarcely spoke during intermissions. She did not know that the audience stared rudely at her and Leswing or that Leswing's cynical eyes softened unto boyishness as he watched her. Leswing could not have repeated a line of the play, he had merely informed himself of its trend beforehand. Dale could have reacted the entire drama.

She found Durant's studio the type of place where only the ultra set are welcomed. As Africa's diamond king Leswing was a choice visitor. Mrs. Wicks politely napped in an anteroom until two A. M., while Dale, with flushed cheeks and tumbled peacock band, learned many strange things.

She studied the women as they made advances to Leswing — polite, veiled advances, it is true, but advances. She watched the men toady to him and agree with his lightest word. Dale became aware of three things during her first studio party: First, that Leswing was a highly desirable matrimonial prize and could marry almost anyone he wished; second, that there were depths within herself of which she had not dreamed — strange

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chaotic longings and traits which began to manifest themselves. Perhaps it was the band of peacock feathers or Leswing's shining Cobra ring or the highly seasoned food or the play or the thrill of excitement when the men clustered round her with admiring formality — well-dressed, well-groomed men who were polite to the *n*th degree, and clever and apparently carefree and idle. The third thing Dale realized, after she was alone, tossing sleeplessly about, was that perhaps she might not be happy with John-Giant — perhaps it was unfair to both of them! After which she fell asleep and dreamed that John-Giant kissed her good-by; she felt the pressure of his firm, true lips and heard him murmur, "You are mine, mine, mine —" wakening to stretch out her hands as if to find the lovely glow of the old dormitory days to lead her back into security.

During the evening she had experienced the curious sensation of contrasts — hard to express. For instance, when the opera singer begged her to name some song she wished to hear she thought of the cost of the hundred acres of land and the way the potato bugs had ravaged the fields nearest the road. When some well-gowned woman flirted with Leswing and Leswing gracefully drifted back to "his

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child," as he had introduced her, saying some pretty thing under his breath and fishing out the fattest macaroon from the passing plate, she would remember John-Giant as he sat at his wood carving or stood in the heart of his woodlands about to wield his ax — she saw faded old World's End, the little island, the animal cemetery on the night of her unattended party with John-Giant, sole guest, who braved Amherst's ostracism to come, just because she wanted him!

As she sat up in bed after the dream, stretching out her hands, she thought of the brocaded hatboxes and silky frocks cunningly wrapped in silver tissue — and of Mrs. Abner and the plans for gingham house dresses!

There had been many risqué gay things said at the studio party, and likewise many wise, saddish ones. Dale had been watching the grown-up word play. John-Giant did not play — he merely ceased to work. She became convinced that what Leswing said was true — a different world lay outside John-Giant's domain, a world so fascinating that it could not help but intoxicate all who merely watched its gambols.

She heard the women's pointedly envious comments concerning Paradisio, and she thought of Leswing, supreme yet alone, sailing

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back forever. Then the facts that she had proposed O. and E. suppers and meatless days and corrective diets for John-Giant, and that his socks did require endless darning, and she loathed such work — had never done it — reproached yet terrified her. She dropped back among the pillows, still sleepless, the growing pains continuing with merciless speed. In the morning Dale had determined what she should do — enjoy herself in this new world and participate in all it offered. Then she would be quite sure as to whether she could cook O. and E. suppers — and as to Leswing's sailing home alone!

CHAPTER XV

YOU'RE delicious, Glory Dimples!" Leswing told her after their ride. They had eloped for luncheon at Casino Park. "So you did not like the lady with the faint mustache? No more do I. Twice she cornered romantic gentlemen with unpleasant sacks of letters and demanded matrimony or compensation. And what did you think of Stapleton — him of the pince-nez and the copper-colored face? An authority on Jap prints — but I notice he found greater interest talking tennis with you. Dale, I'm afraid you are grown up and I have no one to play with me."

Dale began to realize another vast difference between John-Giant and Leswing. John-Giant did not condone every fault and laugh at every opinion. Indeed, he took her gravely to task for extravagantly doing this or that or fancying the world to be regulated after her own notions. Leswing laughed at all she said or did. She might even fly into a little pout or show an irritating ignorance at a critical moment, but Leswing made her feel she could do no wrong; moreover, that all she said or did

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was quite the most attractive bit of girlishness possible. It was a grave difference.

"What do we do this afternoon?" Dale asked.

"You must nap. You will grow weary even if you are a wild little American. Have Toinette dress you all pretty, and I'll bowl along with a cane and an eyeglass to escort you to afternoon tea at Sherry's — rather a mixed crowd; but Stapleton will be there to tell you more of his beloved prints — and tennis; and the lady novelist; and some others you have not yet met. This is to be a seance tea with a medium to make connections between the ghosts and the guyed. Nothing real, Dale; just the newest wrinkle. To-night is the opera; Mrs. Wicks must come along to satisfy Peeping Tom, and we won't do anything afterward but let you sleep your head off — or write John-Giant! Poor John-Giant, if he could see you now!" Leswing was like a mischievous schoolboy, not at all the bored man of the world.

"And when shall I go home?" she asked with the frank ingratitude of youth.

"To-morrow?" Leswing's grizzled head bent on one side.

"No-o — not until we have done a few more things. I want to see the Zoo."

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"They'll all be at the Windemeres' crush. That's to-morrow. Then we have an invitation from the Hamilton-Coxes to tour in the Berkshires for a last and rousing week-end. Would you like that — or have you seen a house-party in full tilt?"

"Never! Let us go to the house party, Mr. Leswing."

"We shall, Miss Aldis! Why such a formal maiden? Say Philip, and make me feel human instead of a fishy-eyed Victorian guardian in an 1860 novel — asking you to do French verbs on a holiday!"

"But what are you to me — what do people say?"

"You are everything to me!" An eager look shone in the scarred face. "As for people, they go no further than the titles of diamond king and Lord Aldis' daughter — that stays the dikes of Madam Grundy."

"I often think of the house-parties of the past," Leswing was sketching an intricate design on the cloth by means of his dessert fork; "you would have delighted in their sheer romantic beauty and daring, even though M. Prudhomme hid his face and extended a hand of decorous sympathy to certain Victorian matrons waiting in British drawing-rooms for the prodigals' return! You don't understand

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what a terrible thing was a British drawing-room — do you? Awful high mantels as gruesome as the tombs of the early martyrs — with clocks and ornaments of curlycue china — like blue whipped cream — and terrible bell-pulls of magenta satin with their ponderous tassels and those hideous objects — ‘suites of furniture’ done in discouraging tapestries. Another blight on civilization were the fur rugs over which the returning and repentant husbands, brothers, and sons would be sure to slip and wrench an ankle! I have often thought the so-called home body displayed her latent cruelty and love of wanton sport by spreading down those beastly stuffed heads with snarling Paris-plaster teeth for her dear ones’ downfall — only the world was too stupid to comprehend.”

“Go on — I love that,” said Dale, with a blasé air of the world.

“Besides all this a British drawing-room had the conventional engravings and portraits — and copies of illustrated poems such as ‘The Earl’s Return’ upon which to lavish one’s intellect. There were urns for vases, filled with artificial blossoms, as likely as not, and ridiculous music spread on the piano-forte which no one enjoyed hearing or playing — except unmarried daughters with good-

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looking shoulders — the player sitting with her back to the audience — and as likely as not they would inflict Bach on one! And the stupendous stupidity of it — like pale, heavy puddings, with a few lonely and helpless raisins sunk together in a sad little coterie at the bottom. The raisins are to represent the few choice spirits who preferred the house-parties such as Mirza and your father and I, a blushing lad, knew.”

He paused, smiling sadly as he studied her face — it was not a customary expression.

“Please go on — let us flee from British drawing-rooms and tell me of the house-parties.”

“By rights I should continue — to make the sinners’ cases more plaintive — there were the awful British dining-rooms, with a Swiss cuckoo clock invariably striking wrong and a sideboard loaded with uneatables and a Victorian matron waiting in a fright of a morning gown to welcome one by a canary bird kiss on her left cheek! There were the British studies — but I shan’t inflict any more on you — we shall discuss the house-parties —” then he paused.

“Why hesitate?” Dale said eagerly.

“Because I’m not altogether sure whether it is proper.” Leswing laughed at himself yet he spoke with sincerity.

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"You of all the creatures under the water or on the land or in the air — why hesitate at that?" Dale held up her hands in mock horror.

"Ah, but it is you, Dale — and you are you," he laughed at his nonsensical logic, "and that is why."

Her mouth curved into a one-sided smile. "Can you never forget I am an End of the World person?"

"No, because I resent it," he added forcefully; "not that I do not laugh at conventions! break them — anything you like. I admit they often dull the beauty of romance — but they are necessary, after all — as a stone wall is necessary to shield the beauty of a garden from vandals! It is all very well for two persons to do as they wish — but for a third person to bear the brunt of their willful defiance — it is not 'cricket,' as we say."

"Tell me of the house-parties, please," she interrupted, "and remember John-Giant is going to take me to the beginning of the world very soon —"

The Cobra twinkled brightly. "Well, Mademoiselle, first of all there were gatherings of clever, beautiful super-persons, likewise tragically shattered ones and others ugly as to personal appearance but with the talent

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and wit of the very gods. There was nothing of the rich American's style of giving a house-party — with supercilious butlers investing their tips on the market and maids intent on capturing millionaires during an off morning after too many highballs. Servants were servants because they chose to be; they had learned the value of service and because love more often than not held them to their employers — Glenny is one of them. I knew a Norwegian noblewoman who was penniless, her black frocks frayed and her slippers rusty, yet her old handservant was as reverent in the handling of the faded gowns and blackened pearl ornaments as if they were the newest of Paris creations. We all loved her, though she was neither young nor beautiful and had had a sorry time of it. But she understood both the beauty and the baseness of life and was deceived by neither. We came to her like children and made her 'play' with us. I presume she might have been counted our chaperon — although it never occurred to call her so. Your father did many nice things for her, Dale — as many as she would permit — and your mother used to talk to her in a certain little tea-house that looked off at the sea — and I warrant if any one could have heard their talks they would have been rapt

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with wondering admiration. It was not — ‘how many jewels can I make him give me?’ — or ‘my dear, I am sure she is not telling the truth’ — but they talked of things as fragrant as you have talked — do you understand?

“There were many such as the ‘chaperon’ — there was a Gypsy violinist who had played before every court — and concealed his broken heart save to us. He, too, was a super-being, yet with a gentle, childish soul, despite the stories of the press. He loved your mother, Dale, as did everyone. We called ourselves ‘the souls’ and had our own circle — at which the British drawing-rooms gasped in horror and then promptly sent spies to pin back their ears and listen that they might chuckle over the same in their British boudoirs — remember, Dale, I spared you the pain of describing a British boudoir! Poor dears, it was the nearest — they ever came to really living.” He lapsed into memories.

“And then?” urged Dale a moment later.

“Countless things, my child — countless persons — the Russian princess of whom I once spoke, your father and mother and myself, a very ardent, awkward lad, a ready victim for such a life — staid diplomats and statesmen, men of finance whom the world called stern and formidable, came to play as

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children at the little colony of 'souls' — and shuddered inwardly at the time the world should claim their attention and they would have to replace the mask before their boyish selves. There were many beautiful women who were beautifully wicked, I presume — and many idle men. And we had pink plaster villas and flower gardens of a dozen dazzling hues and faded old trappings for furnishings — things that others had loved and cherished for many years. There were no smart furnishings and luxurious motors — we were shabby and quite pinched as to *carte blanche* more often than not — because of British drawing-rooms. And no one would believe our colony close by the Mediterranean in a little forgotten village lived so very nearly like a nursery! We had tea and queer, flat, twisted cakes with our initials in caraway seeds for an afternoon's consummation — does that sound so awfully awful? There was no constant popping of champagne corks and rich, overspiced meals — and unlovely language or actions. Sometimes I find myself thinking that that is for the smug and properly married — We sketched and sang and wrote poems and planned out novels and plays and opera scores — we walked just to see a sunset — can you fancy it in this day and age?

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We sailed on the blue sea and sang as we sailed — or rode in shabby old traps over the countryside to visit ruins and have a simple picnic — and we were truly happy. We were cosmopolitans — since we scoffed at nothing — and accepted nothing as final. We gave wonderful little concerts for ourselves — the most famous artists in the world were of us and took part and the greatest of nations' leaders were our audience — and yet we kept the atmosphere of childishness that defied the sordid dangers. . . . One time your mother danced in the moonlight — and a tulle scarf," he added quickly, "and the Gypsy violinist played a haunting aria as she moved slowly about — it was an old, sunken garden with glorious marble figures which shone in the moonlight and roses sent their fragrance across to us on the summer breeze. . . ."

"Yet," Dale shook her head, "they left me at World's End — and it was not right!"

"It was not right," he repeated, "even with all the beauty and the romance — and when I catch myself wondering why it was not right — you are my answer."

"It is not right because they think of no future — only the present — as bad an error as to dissipate the present by brooding over the past.

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"Before the cloudburst of seriousness engulfs us — let us fly," Leswing proposed, rising, "and allow me to say that you have given me a happier time than even those stolen weeks with 'the souls.'"

"Thank you," she answered gravely; "I am glad."

Dale grew positively oldish during the afternoon tea, with women ogling at Leswing and men telling her sweetish things and Stapleton explaining his ten-thousand-dollar print. Ten thousand for a print and twenty thousand for a vase of the Ming dynasty — and Leswing had a marble Venus de Milo which cost him fifty! He admitted this easily and said he called it his Grande Dame, allowing her to preside over the music room.

For six thousand John-Giant was to buy the land — for ten thousand he could build the big house — fifty thousand would purchase everything John-Giant wished for. Something about this contrast made Dale unable to think coherently. She caught a fragment of "twenty thousand for that sullen black-pearl ring, my dear," and then she heard Leswing telling of his yacht, the Blue Moon, a marvel for a hundred thousand; and for a lark he had an old Roman galley with blacks to work it whenever he celebrated some an-

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cient feast day. A hundred thousand dollars for a yacht, a toy, and John's flat-bottomed boat, the Ark, which he had made himself and in which Dale had been rowed on glorious moonglow evenings!

The host's wife admired her frock — she had four stolid daughters of whom she wished to dispose matrimonially; in fact, she would have been almost willing to group the four and surround Leswing at the altar. A diamond king and owner of Paradisio, besides being a well-bred Englishman often asked to tea with royalty, was entitled to leeway regarding wives.

This thin girl with dusky brown hair and a becoming frock of soft ivory annoyed yet interested her. She knew she had a history, that she was very young and equally naïve, and that Leswing posed as a semi guardian. She could not understand why Dale was not making eyes at Leswing or forcing herself into a compromising position in order that their engagement be announced. Dale was polite, but instinct whispered to suppress this salmon-satin-clad woman in a hideous scoop bonnet.

"The wife went insane," Stapleton was saying. He was telling about two prints he had found in an old farmhouse. "They

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always do, you know, if they have any smattering of brains." He flecked his cigarette ash into Leswing's palm for a lark. "Hard work, children — the usual stuff. So the man was delighted to make a few dollars from heathen pictures — he was paying four dollars a week at an asylum —?"

"Was she incurable?" The Cobra sparkled gayly.

"I suppose — I was n't interested in the woman — merely the prints. Some one told me his father had them; his father had been a sailor. The children ran round like neglected cattle — awful place — I could smell it a week. Vinegar and pig and something burnt on the stove, and the youngest child was all sour milk and brown sugar. Farms are the devil's estates, are n't they — that is, for the washed?"

"Are you in a draft, Dale?" Leswing bent forward.

Dale's face was flushed. She was thinking: "John-Giant said he would study engineering. Well, he must keep my money until he has finished. It is n't fair — to me."

Leswing sought her out a little later and carried her off, amid protests from the rest of the company.

"There won't be any more party when you

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two go," they insisted; "you're a storybook couple."

But Leswing had insisted, being halted on the steps by a reporter who wanted his impressions as to American women.

Leswing gave him a cigar and passed on. Dale wondered at the way he managed things. She was silent as they drove back.

"What worries Glory-Dimples?" Leswing's soft hand touched her gloved one.

"Does it fit me to marry John?" she asked anxiously. "I'm afraid not — Philip." She hesitated as she spoke his name. "I'm afraid you are making me like this sort of thing."

"What a tragedy!" Leswing laughed. "The opera is *Louise*, and I think you'll approve. Remember — forty winks, a sensible dinner, and I'll be with you in time to hear Mrs. Wicks ask to be loved."

Mrs. Wicks was rustling about the apartment when Dale entered. There was a letter for her, brought up by Leswing's man, and her black eyes narrowed a trifle as if she disapproved.

"My dear, I want you to love me — and if you love me you must confide in me — all my girls do. Don't you want me to help you read your letter?"

Dale turned it over, John had sealed it with

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a wad of wax, placing his thumb print firmly in the center. Dale felt amused. Besides, the strong straight writing brought John-Giant to her amid all this squirrel cage.

"Thanks, I'd rather not," she said as easily as even Leswing could have done. "I'll eat in my room, for I'm fagged and the opera is something for which I ought to rest."

John's letter was a mixture of boyish jealousy and a tender solicitude for Dale. It began:

"Dear Dale: There is n't anything to say now you are in New York. I guess you are the one who can tell the news. The cabin seems lonesome; so does World's End. I walked by this morning and Glenny was raking up the leaves. She did n't speak to me, so I did n't bother her. You know she never liked me.

"I hope you are having a good time — don't hurry home just because you think you should. Only you can gamble that I am mighty lonesome and of course I can't help wishing I was along. Sometime we will see New York together, won't we, pal?

"I'm tired to-night, but am going to study a little. I don't believe, Dale, that you'll ever stand farm life. You are right about my being something else. When you come back we will decide about it and then be married. After we are married things won't seem so hard. Just now everything is going against the stream. This is n't a jolly letter to send you, so I'll close and wait until I can write a hummer. Take care of yourself, dearest. I'm going to make you a scrap book of

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pressed autumn leaves; the ones on the cabin are gorgeous.

“YOUR JOHN-GIANT.

“P. S. Regards to Mr. L. Trig was looking fine; he was playing round the gate.”

The letter did not satisfy Dale. She expected it to stimulate her, the same as if John-Giant were actually at hand. It seemed a boorish, egotistical thing and she did not attempt answering it as she had expected. So she lay down for the forty winks, which lasted until Toinette brought in dinner.

The opera added several years to Dale's mental growth — she was fast approaching the octogenarian stage — not only the opera proper with its lovely music and talent combining to send her into a wonderland all her own, but the horseshoe of boxes with their nodding, bedecked occupants ogling at Leswing and her in a manner quite fascinating.

They had intended going home, but Leswing was pounced on, as Mrs. Wicks said, by some more friends, who insisted that they carry them off for a supper. So they sat until the cool of the early morning over a flower-decked table in some private palace talking seriously of light things and lightly of serious things. It was this topsy-turvy state of mentality that bewildered Dale. But she

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gradually understood. This sort of people, the people who with Leswing made of life a long and never-ending playtime, were possessed of a mighty flippancy concerning the things that John-Giant revered. They threw a weird spotlight of beauty about immorality, making it a fictitious adventure rather than a dreary reality. They divided the world into two classes — the washed and the unwashed; and proceeded accordingly.

Dale felt a thrill of intoxication as she listened to the chatter and watched the white-necked women play gracefully for their hearts' desire. It was an interesting game and one which she felt she could take part in with considerable animation. She liked the luxuries of the senses and the carefree attitude toward anything which smacked of labor or responsibility. It was one thing to give ten thousand dollars for a baby nursery — and quite another to take the sole care of a child day in and night out! It was passé to wear a gown more than half a dozen times or to bother one's head about the inward working of one's house — whereas to scramble through half a dozen states in pursuit of a compromising letter written by a late President and have said letter framed and hung in the drawing-room or to engage a detective to watch one's

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collection of Egyptian relics was not only proper but necessary to being smart, and therein folks should not spare themselves. After all, the difference between these people and John-Giant was a difference of values. And Dale, leaning back in her chair to watch the party, began to question John's youthful positiveness. John too was young and had not lived.

She shopped with Mrs. Wicks the next morning, sending Glenny a shawl and John some shirts — both sent in quite the same spirit of necessity. Then Mrs. Wicks took her to a clever tea room for luncheon, where they could toy with truffles and caviar and discuss frills and frocks. Dale could not bring herself to tell Mrs. Wicks of John-Giant and that she would have need of but few and simple frocks. Even if John should take her money and live in New York while he studied she would still need very little.

Leswing bumped into them, as he said, bringing some clubmen who wanted to meet Dale. They carried her off to a country club for some sort of high jinks in honor of a foreign golf expert. Here Dale saw the homage paid to the skill of a golfer — and remembered the ridicule paid to the one who guided the plow.

Leswing pointed out the celebrities and

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salubrities with clever epigrams. He stayed near Dale so as to take care of her beautifully. Leswing knew just how to take care of a woman and make her feel protected unto the last shoe button, yet he did not openly monopolize her as John-Giant would have done. Regretfully Dale heard him say good-by to Mrs. Wicks and plead an evening engagement. She resigned herself to a lonesome evening in the gold-and-coral apartment, trying to write an interesting letter to John, but failing utterly!

CHAPTER XVI

A MONTH later Dale Aldis admitted that John-Giant's letters were not only tyrannical but in poor taste. He had tired of waiting for the real love letter she promised in her hastily written notes. He said he was lonesome and discouraged and wanted to know the day she was coming back. The Laird of McNab had died and he would not get another horse until he knew Dale's plans. He was glad she was having a good time, only he was lost without her. He had repented of not speaking to Glenney and had humbly gone to call, only to be snubbed. He had made the scrapbook and the raffia baskets, and her writing desk was finished all except the motto — what did she want carved across the front panel?

Dale had excused her hurried notes with "When I see you we'll make up by talking," or "I'm so tired, John-Giant, my head aches and we have a busy evening, there are so many people to see and so many things to do; and of course I'll never have such a wonderful time again." This hurt, but Dale unthinkingly had written it.

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John had demanded to know when Leswing was going home — if he never worked or thought of care; to which Dale had replied in a spirited tone, saying that Mr. Leswing was extremely busy in his own fashion and if John could see the way people rushed after him and the furore he created he would be ashamed to have asked such a question.

John had not written when Dale went on the motor trip with the Hamilton-Coxes. But Dale was so busy and happy in a new and dangerous fashion, and so sure, after all, that she would marry this John-Giant and have all these wonderful experiences to tell him that she had not worried.

Returning to New York, with Leswing hinting of his departure, she had found this curt paragraph:

Dale: Is there any use in our going on? You know what I mean. I feel so utterly out of it all, and you said you would come back long ago and we would be married. What is wrong, dear? Are you confused again? They've got you down there in the big town and just shown you one dazzle after another. That is n't square. Come home, dearest — I want you.

JOHN.

It struck Dale as presumptuous. Leswing always treated her as if she were a grand duchess; all the older men did. A young girl grows

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fond of this sort of deference, since it is really the deference which age pays youth. Why should she come home before Leswing sailed — they were planning a wonderful party for him, following him out in a yacht to throw bushels of flowers. Dale felt it was the least she could do — to say *bon voyage!*

When Leswing dropped in for afternoon tea, Mrs. Wicks tactfully dropping out, Dale told him this.

"Of course I must be fair to John," she added; "but I want to see you set sail — that is, if you wish me."

"I should n't sail unless you did." He laid a corsage of English violets in her lap. "Well, suppose I sail next week — what then?"

"It has been a wonderful playtime, for which I shall always thank you — always!" Dale's lips quivered.

"I don't want to set sail," Leswing added; "that is — alone. I believe you've taught me to be very fond of you." He touched his scarred cheek, the Cobra shining brightly.

"I'm fond of you, Philip," she said slowly. "Everyone is fond of you. Sometimes I wonder if it is because of your wonderful treasures."

"But in all the chattering of them" — Leswing reached in an inner pocket — "I did not

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let them suspect my greatest." He laid a flat black case on the cloth between them. "I don't mind their talking about Mrs. Venus or the Blue Moon or a few garish things like that — but this, Dale, only such as you could comprehend." He opened the case as he spoke.

On a black velvet background rested the most curious jewel she had ever seen — an unset opal two inches in length and half as wide, in whose blue-gold cream-gray lavender depths rested the outline of a sleeping woman clad in blush-rose draperies. She was lying on her side, each tiny feature as perfect as if some sculptor had conceived a way of so fashioning her beneath the stone.

"That is my cloud sprite," said Leswing, enjoying Dale's silent wonder, "from the private collection of a roguish old rajah who became hard up after a fling in Paris. There she is — drifting to sleep among the clouds. Dale, that stone is worth half a million."

Dale laid it in the palm of her hand. She was still silent. Half a million! Piles of dimes for a grave marker!

"If I ever came a cropper and went bankrupt," he added, "I should toss the cloud sprite into the sea before I would let it go to the vulgarly rich. But if I loved some one very dearly I should give it to her as a mascot.

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Jewels are mascots, Dale. Here is my Cobra, wisest of the wise," he lifted his finger as he spoke; "my cloud sprite is my religion. Then I've a black diamond, the Imp, which goes with me on all my reckless expeditions; and an emerald — the Divine Grassplot, I've named it; and a sapphire, Angel's Smile. But they are at Paradisio. I brought the cloud sprite because I could not bear to leave her."

"Will she ever waken?" Dale's fancy played along as Leswing's had done.

"Sometime — if I could kiss her eyes. I often dream of her wakening. I tell myself she is an imprisoned princess banished there by the old rajah. Other times she is an exiled angel. Again she becomes the dead wife of an unworthy man, who chose a jewel for her casket in order that when he repented he could not know where to mourn her — a thousand dreams. Well, what would you say if I gave her to you, Dale?"

Dale put up her hands in protest.

"Please take her to Paradisio — I'm afraid she would surely dream bad dreams in a log cabin."

Like a physical caress Leswing replaced her in the case and then in his pocket.

"And now," said Dale, forcing herself to speak, "we must decide."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Decide what?" He came to sit near her on the coral tête-à-tête.

"About John-Giant. . . . I don't want to be a farmer's wife, Philip; so much I admit. I don't believe I could make him happy — do you?"

"No, Dale." He stroked her cheek cleverly.

"If we were married now and I could help him a little longer he could find a position."

"What do you call a position?"

"Two thousand a year would be excellent."

Leswing's face was a study.

"I know it is n't as much as the keep of your horse," she said a little bitterly, "and you paid a hundred thousand for your yacht — and all the rest. You've taught me to know such things — and to like them. I must begin to forget."

"You never will," Leswing murmured.

"No?" Her head tilted defiantly. "Well, where were we? Oh, yes! John's position — two thousand a year. I shall ask him to use my money until he has fitted himself for that."

"Why marry until he has?"

"We must marry — we can't wait years. Besides, John needs the money and he could n't take it unless we were married — he'll rebel against taking it as it is. Only — I would n't be happy."

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Dale had learned to take herself seriously. Hitherto she had been merely an untutored, charming child with an impulsive, tempestuous little heart. She had watched Leswing's set take themselves seriously, admire their bad qualities and overemphasize their good ones, pamper their tendencies and adore their own peculiarities — it was all a part of the game. Dale was beginning to do likewise.

"Suppose he refuses?"

"But he must —" She turned to look at Leswing. Something in his face, which he had repressed for a long time, frightened her — a starved-beast look, pathetic, menacing, fatal!

"Philip, are you angry?" She stirred uneasily.

"I love you." His soft hands closed on her wrists like cold chains. "You will marry me and come to Paradisio."

Dale laughed confusedly. "I'm years younger — how foolish —"

"I grant you that," he said swiftly; "but in heart I'm a boy, younger than even this John-Giant. You must come back with me, Dale; you are the only thing in the world that I want."

She was silent, rather stunned with the confession.

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Leswing waited briefly and then continued. "And since you ask about the money, insist upon bringing it to a direct issue, I shall tell you the truth: There is no money, Dale, except what I have given your mother and yourself — not a farthing! You don't suppose, my child, that Aldis fancied he was to die overnight — or that, having done so, his wife would help the woman who had taken her husband from her, outraged her own title of wife? My dear, men and women are queer creatures and the most loving of them often fail to protect their loved. That was exactly your father's mistake.

"At the time I was a chivalrous youth, romantically inclined, and so I came to the rescue. I brought your mother to America, at her wish, and built her house; and never let her know it was my pocket money, not her dead hero's. The London world never knew. It was nothing for which to be praised. I wanted to do it. I deserve no credit. Then — after a little — I went to Africa and luck came to fairly haunt me. What was a few thousand a year compared to a woman's abject want, a woman with an unnamed child, a girl-child as well? What could she have done? She was mentally paralyzed from the moment word reached her of his death. She had loved so

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fiercely that sanity in certain phases left her when that love was thwarted. I, who had watched, understood. Perhaps it was a queer thing to do — you asked me once what I did in the way of charity — *voilà!*” He shrugged his shoulders.

“All these years, never seeing me, or caring — or anything — you have supported me.” Dale put her hands to her eyes as if to shut out present reality and slip back to the dormitory days, the strange home-coming, the mystery of that fading mother. “She would have had to work like a charwoman; I would have been in an institution — Oh, no, Philip; tell me it is n’t true — that he did provide —”

Leswing shook his head. “Not a farthing. Why attach importance to what I did? I don’t. Merely that since you ask, even demand — and since this John person would demand as well, I must tell you. There is no money.”

“You came again to bury her in Florence — you came here to see me —”

“Not another second’s thought about it! Merely a compliment paid to a splendid, daring love story — Aldis would have done the same for some other man. Dale, darling, you can’t marry this John-Giant; you’re a tender baby thing and you don’t realize. Don’t go

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getting red eyes from crying or turn away from me. You want to thank me? Marry me. You shan't shut yourself away from the world on a farm. You can't—you'd elope with a circus man from sheer ennui. No child of Mirza and Aldis ever could. I've known it all along. I thought I was taking the slow, kind way of showing you the difference—you were made for this sort of life—not log cabins!"

Dale walked to the sham fireplace, looking down at the smartly imitated logs.

"Marry me and we will go to Paradisio." Leswing came beside her, the Cobra sparkling enthusiastically. "Please, Dale, look up and say you will. Don't you suppose I know how to make you very happy? Don't you suppose it is much kinder to John? He will thank you later on—some broad-hipped farmer's daughter will be a recompense. My dear, what would you do without a dollar in the world—and a few silk frocks which were never intended for berry picking? What would you do? Remember Mrs. Abner; that is no far cry! Don't look at me with such startled eyes, Dale—like a deer facing a gun barrel. Have I been such a cad? Have I rushed you? Did I say 'You shall never marry this dolt!' Did I blurt out my secret about the money like a stage villain? I grant you that it was a wise

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experience — this pretending to be in love. Go on dreaming that you are, if you like. But marry me — that is all I ask, Dale — and come to Paradisio. There I can fight phantom John-Giants. Well — will you accept the cloud sprite?" He was bending down, his scarred cheek touching hers.

"I must tell John first," she whispered. "I want to think — think — think!" She beat her hands together with frantic helplessness.

"That never gets you anywhere," laughed Leswing. "Kiss me, Dale! You don't suppose I'll give you up?"

"I must tell John," she repeated.

"Tell John-Giant — but you will marry me. Paradisio — the sea booming, the lions on the rocks, the yacht, moonlight, rose gardens, lacy frocks and —"

"Philip, I must get it all clear first. There was never any money — never. You did everything for us — everything. Then John came. John won't take the money, he says — and I can't be a farm woman. But there is n't any money."

She looked at him, the eyes still the startled ones of a deer at bay, and a hard little line crept across her forehead. Dale was all woman.

"We will have a quiet wedding, for I loathe

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a crush, and sail off in the night, so to speak." Leswing was stroking her head.

"John-Giant — he —" She struggled to free her thoughts.

"Shall we tell him — or be married first? That would be best — and then go together; tell him there is no money and you could not drudge away youth in a log cabin; say if he really loves you he will be glad. A person who really loves another wants only what is best for them. I can give you the best, Dale —"

"When did you begin to love me?" she asked.

"At World's End, of course, dear stupid! Men of my age and position do not ask young girls in no way connected with them to come to New York and proceed on such an elaborately formal scale. It would be absurd. The people you have met know I intend to marry you. They needed no clumsy announcements. Don't you understand, Dale? I wanted to show you my side as well as John-Giant's. I must marry you and take you to Paradisio!"

"We will never come back?"

"Never! America is entirely too efficient one moment and too extravagant the next to foster the romance which I am determined

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shall be ours. At Paradisio the very elixir of love is to be had for the wishing. There is nothing that is not beautifully worth while. My cloud sprite belongs there — but you shall judge for yourself. I feel you will be so much more mine at Paradisio — the very presence of the natives will emphasize the contrast, the dependency for companionship. I want to shut you away from everyone, Dale, for a long, long time.” Leswing’s eyes were as ardent as a schoolboy’s.

A strange languor seemed to spring from Dale’s heart, not her body. Subtle flattery had spun its web, and when she struggled to escape the effort resulted in naught but defeat.

“How can you love me so much? I, who have so loved John-Giant!”

“Love is not meant to be understood, Dale.” He took her gently in his arms. She felt chilled and dreary, as if she must break back to the fire to dream simple dreams of O. and E. suppers and darning for John while he read aloud.

“I have waited many years for such a love as this. For what else is such a place as Paradisio? For what else is the rest of my life?”

“You are many years older”—she stared with the frank eyes of unflattering youth — “nearly thirty!”

“I shall not live to be old with you,” he

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begged. "Just a few brief years and then you will be alone — with everything I shall have ever owned. You will have no need of anyone to protect you" — Leswing played his last card — "as I protected Mirza."

"You did everything," she repeated, turning back to him; "all these years with no thought of return, no idea whether I —"

"Whether you were snub-nosed and crossed of eye or whether you were Dale, the most willowy fay creature imaginable. I merely paid my tribute to romance. Tell me, do I deserve nothing in return?"

A moment later she answered: "Let me tell John myself."

Leswing gave a joyous cry. The Cobra flashed its ecstasy.

"I will give World's End for a hospital; the town needs one," she continued evenly. "You need not come with me while I tell John. Glenny and I will meet you here."

"I think I had better," he said anxiously.

The gray eyes flickered. Being all grown up and dreary of heart Dale understood that Leswing still feared John-Giant. With all his worldly supremacy and past record for unsurpassing charity she feared him because he was young and strong and white of soul.

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"Very well," she answered; "and now, Philip —"

"Kiss me!" he whispered.

As she did so John's words repeated themselves. "No one shall ever kiss you like this — you are mine — mine — mine!"

She had said her heart and her body were John's, and he had answered that such a union bespoke a soul and so her soul was his as well. What else had she to give Leswing? Her mind — a worldly mentality won by a clever siege of luxury! That was all. It seemed that Leswing was getting the worst of the bargain.

She was thinking of John's bruised, withering dreams, wondering briefly as Leswing released her if anyone had really loved him with the passion of youth and the purity of maidenhood — as she had loved John-Giant? And what would become of her heart and her body, now that they could not belong to John-Giant?

"You can finish trousseau hunting in France," Leswing was saying. "We ought to be ready to sail in ten days."

CHAPTER XVII

SHE expects a tip," Dale said scornfully as Mrs. Wicks rustled about preparatory to Dale's departure for World's End.

Always ready for such occasions, as any true fairy godfather ought to be, Leswing produced a set of elaborate jet combs which caused much flecking of an embroidered handkerchief and the request that Dale always love her.

They motored to World's End, reaching there at dusk of the second day. It was fallish and Leswing shivered from loathed cold.

"France is often beastly this time of year," he said. "I say we go direct to Paradisio, Dale, and run over to Paris in the summer."

Dale merely smiled. She was turning an eager face toward the old green house, noting that the gate was relocked and once more the convent order of bell-ringing existed. Glenny came to the gate, curtsying like an animated manikin. Toinette, whom Leswing had suggested accompanying them, stood by in supreme scorn.

"You've come into your own, my lamb!" Glenny whispered.

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Dale nodded vaguely, pushing by them and rushing up the walk. The drawing-room door was ajar. She hesitated before she entered — it was the last time she was to see the drawing-room, since it was to be dismantled and disposed of in Leswing's efficient fashion once he had a proper incentive. He had suggested that they give the house and grounds to Amherst. Dale consented — nothing seemed to matter since this incombustible ennui of the soul had come upon her. To have told John and seen the stab in the deep-sea eyes were the only things of importance. Paradise mattered very little!

She saw herself — a long-legged, unwanted child — returned from the convent, begging for cinnamon buns and chocolate, and Mirza answering fretfully to go to Glenny. For a moment she almost wished she could relive those lonely years.

She saw John-Giant as he had come the first time to be her guest. She could almost hear his awkward tramping round the room as she pointed out this picture and that and the little marionette theater, long out of use, which had been Mirza's. Well, Leswing was coming up the walk and Humphrey and Toinette were piling bags out of the motor. Leswing was very soon to be her husband and they would

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sail for Paradisio, where she was to be as imprisoned as the cloud sprite, while Leswing psychically gathered back his youth!

"There is n't much you want, is there? How about burning the letters? I think it would be best." Leswing had waved the servants round to the back and was close beside her. "I fancy they'll have to tear the whole place down and rebuild —"

"Oh, no doubt!" Dale passed inside and threw her fur coats on the nearest chair.

"This marionette theater ought to be put in working order — it would amuse the children. And how about all this?" He indicated the furnishings.

"I don't care for anything," she said steadily.

"Nor I. I never want to take anything to Paradisio save what I have selected. It has never been cluttery in a single corner. These things belong to a lived-out tragedy, Dale. Let them stay to furnish the parlors of the Amherst Hospital." Leswing laughed.

"I shall go upstairs to dress," she answered.

Leswing kissed her. "It won't be very long, darling, will it? We can finish here in a few days — then New York — then —"

"Can we — in a few days?" There was a hidden note of regret.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"About four, if you wish — no longer."

"Then we'll say four —"

"What worries, dearest — the telling him?"

Leswing's lips pinched in a trifle at the corners.

"Let me —"

"Oh, no! I must tell John myself."

"Shall I be present?"

"I want to be alone with him, Philip — to go to his cabin."

"Nonsense — such primitive youngsters are too savage!"

Dale smiled. "You don't understand — not at all. Of course I shall go alone to tell him!"

"Why not here?" Leswing debated how far to press the question.

"It would be kinder," was all she answered.

Tired from the wooing and winning of youth Leswing stayed in the old guest room, oblivious of creases in his brocaded dressing gown or stray threads on the carpet. He was considering a number of things: First, he must not let it be more than four days — the memory of those deep-sea eyes were unpleasant in their possibilities; secondly, he must compensate John-Giant for his loss. It would hit two birds with one stone — this last: John, being naught but an American peasant, Leswing had deceived himself, would be more

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easily soothed, and Dale with the aristocracy of her birthright would see that John accepted a tip — even as Mrs. Wicks the jet jewelry. Besides — here Leswing's grizzled head dropped thoughtfully a moment — besides — And he stopped his very thoughts lest they go to wooing latent self-sacrifice! After all, he told himself a moment later, Dale would come to look upon this as a disgraceful little incident, something to blush over when she was forced to recall it. There was the setting of the cloud sprite to be determined on, for the third thing; and Dale's rooms at Paradisio to get ready, for the fourth. And a certain full-faced Spanish woman who lived in elegant isolation in the hills must be sent flying and the villa pulled down. It could all be arranged; money could arrange everything — both the selling and the stabbing of youth — both of which Leswing knew.

He rang for some brandy. "Has Miss Aldis gone out?" he asked, not imagining in the least that she had.

"Yes, sir," Glenly told him. "It's to 'is 'ut, I fancy, sir." Glenly was darkly disapproving.

"Ah!" Leswing placed his tapering finger tips together. "This house is like a barn. Get some heat into it, and bring me a brandy.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Then order the car. I'll drive until the place is fit to stay in."

Glenny curtsied.

"And what will you do after Miss Dale has gone?" he continued.

Glenny's face turned white, "Hafter she 'as gone, sir? My lamb needs me — she would be too strange! Oh, no, sir, I could n't be left be'ind!"

"You in Africa?" Leswing laughed. "The lions would spoil your slumbers, and you'd start in to convert the heathen and thereby ruin their dispositions. We'll ship you to London town — you can start a shop."

Glenny's knotted fingers twisted the crisp apron ruffle. "I choose to go with my lamb," she began faintly. "I was with 'er mother, sir — I was with 'er from the moment she first drew breath —"

"Other times, other manners. You'd keep bringing things up to mind. Things about — ah, what's the use of arguing! We will send you to hear the Bow Bells, Glenny; I am sure that would be best."

Glenny turned away. So Dale was to go alone to Paradisio; Glenny was to see none of her triumph! Yet she did not dispute Leswing's word — no one disputed it for that matter. She went back to her kitchen. She,

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too, saw a phantom Dale in her short lacy frocks, sitting on a chair waiting until the cinnamon buns were baked to a turn. She could hear her whispering, "Glenny, could I eat to-day's share and to-morrow's share now — and next Tuesday's? Because I'll be back at school Tuesday! I want to take them over on the island and play I'm shipwrecked!" . . . London and a shop with a bell and living rooms in the rear, and her lamb alone at Paradisio. Some fine-aired French woman like this Toinette to take her place. John Coventry had planned no such exile — Dale had told her John wished Glenny to stay with them. He planned for and expected it.

She turned to the cupboard to begin dinner. "Like an old 'orse turned out to pasture when 'e's done trottin'," she ruminated; "and an old woman is sent off to keep a shop — and 'er tongue silent. That's the way of the gentry," she added — Glenny's first democratic speech. "John would n't 'ave done it — 'e'd been willing to listen to me scold because my lamb needed me."

John was not home when Dale reached the cabin. As a matter of fact he had gone to see if a letter had come from her; there had been none in three days. The dried leaves crackled

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underfoot and the vines, stripped of foliage and blossom, rattled in the fall wind. Dale shivered as she reached the door. She knew just where John hid the key, for they had often joked about it and she had hid notes as a surprise. Mechanically her fingers stole up to the cubbyhole. Then she opened the door and went inside, moving with the slowness of one who is dreaming.

The raffia baskets she saw first of all, piled in a heap on a homemade chair — a gift offering for when she should return. She could tell from the appearance of her last letter, lying on the table, that he had carried it with him. There stood her new writing desk, an admirable bit of home work, with the curved chair which she had fancied to match. Across the front panel was cut in Old English style: *The Key That is Used Grows Bright*.

Dale understood — it was to be inspiration for her in the midst of her new labors!

John had neglected housekeeping. There was dust of long standing here and there, and the kitchen harbored unwashed dishes. A diagram of a new house lay beside her letter — John's dream pastime; and outside was stacked the new lumber for their addition — a sun parlor, a dining room and a bedroom for Glenny if she chose to stay. One time

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Dale had tidied up for him; she laughed as she thought of it — but it was not a laugh inviting response. The fire in the hearth had died down, the room was cold, and she knelt to poke it with a stick until little sparks flashed here and there. She wondered how long it would be before he returned. Yet she did not care — it seemed pleasant in the cabin despite the dust, even though she had come to say good-by! An atmosphere of work permeated the place. She felt as if she could begin to plan again — plan for something besides supreme, unmarred pleasure and perfect isolation, triumphant possession of the world's choicest treasures.

John bounded through the door, guessing rightly when he spied it was unlocked.

"Darling!" he said, tossing off his shaggy coat, "you surprised me! Just when I was as blue as indigo because there was no letter —"

Dale rose swiftly to face him. He knew when he looked at her — something in the pale grave face chilled and frightened. It was a different Dale, just as he had prophesied!

"John, don't kiss me — wait until I explain. There is so much to explain and I am tired of trying — even to myself. Perhaps I better tell you what all the explanation has led to — shall I?"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"If you like — won't you kiss me?"

She shook her head. "Not until I tell you; then you may kiss me good-by if you wish. . . . In New York I've been among the world — the world in which Lord Aldis and Mirza lived. I'm not a splendid, high-idealed girl but a weak, yielding creature dependent on the nice things of existence. I would not do for your wife. I'd drag you down by my own discontent — be a parasite. I can't marry you, John-Giant. It would be unfair to both of us — one time you told me there was a caste of justice struggling for existence in this country. Well, I shall help it a bit by not marrying you. It would n't be fair" — she was looking out, beyond him, trying not to let those deep-sea eyes make her heart stir with longing. She was thinking of the contrast between John's rugged face and Leswing's scarred, softish cheeks — with a tendency to a flabby chin!

"Are you joking, Dale?" he said quietly, but he wondered if she could hear the way his heart thumped.

"No, John," she added in the same quiet manner. "I wish things might be different but I could n't do my share of the hill climbing."

"Won't you wait and let me try to make enough money?"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Please, John — it is settled."

"He has convinced you. I knew it." John turned away and took his pipe from the wall rack.

"He is right; you will see as time goes on."

"Of course he is right! I'm not saying he is n't — only why did you make me love you, Dale — and then snatch it all away? Well, I can sell the place and clear out — it would be easier for you."

"Oh, no, no!" she urged. Her lips began to tremble. "For it is I who must go. World's End is to be given to Amherst for a hospital. . . . I shall never be here again." It was so much harder to tell him than she had dreamed. She found herself wanting to creep into his arms and have him kiss her and say, with the fierceness of youth, that she was his. Something in the quiet fashion in which he listened frightened her.

"Where will you go, Dale?"

"To Paradisio," she answered. "I am going to marry Mr. Leswing." Then everything sung round her head in a peculiar fashion.

"Thief!" she heard John say harshly. "Well, I would n't have thought that!"

"You must not say that, John; you must understand! She was all hysterical girl again, the prematurely calm woman had van-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

ished. Youth had called to youth and been answered.

"I know better than you; he wanted you because you were young and innocent, and because he is old and scarred with the things men do." John's voice rose to a sharp incisive tone.

"There never was any money," she protested — "I mean from Lord Aldis — it was Philip who did everything, brought Mirza here and built the villa and supported us. You see, there would be no money to give back."

"I suppose you are paying the debt." John's face was white and filled with shadows like that of an overworked mill hand. "That meant no more to him, Dale, than to keep an old hunting dog in his stable. He hardly realized what he was doing. Men with millions don't. It was n't anything that cost him self-denial; he did n't give of himself. But, then, what's the sense in talking!"

"He would not have told me if I had not asked. I forced him to tell," she kept on steadily. "I think he was quite right to have me come to New York — it is really fair to you, John — suppose I had married you and been wretchedly discontented?"

"You need n't work so hard, Dale; Lessing's sophistry does not interest me; he's

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an old man and he dreads it. He wants youth, a hard thing to buy and make one's own — the right sort of youth. Well — he'll marry you and load your hands with sparkling things and take you back like a slave girl to this place of his, and there you'll stay, to give of your youth until it is faded. He talks of working hard and wearing cheaper clothes and cooking your food and washing your dishes. It's true that is drudgery, but drudgery is the finest thing in the world if it is n't overplayed.

"But he never has hinted of your giving him unwilling kisses and letting his age feed off your youth to stave away the grave. That is what he never mentions. Besides, it can't be done! But you've that to find out. Why, you don't fancy for a moment, do you, Dale, that you have Leswing's love? You have his fierce desire to remain young through the mediumship of yourself — and his fear of wrinkles and canes! You're to be the shield which he holds before him as age advances. . . . That's mighty cheap stuff — that money argument. It was a rich man's prank when he brought your mother here. It pleased Leswing to do it — and he's kept sending the money the same as a man keeps up dues in a club he never attends — a matter of sentiment. But marrying you, Dale, has nothing

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to do with it — nothing whatsoever. He merely wants you because you are young and he is old. . . . Well, is there anything else you want to say?"

"He thinks I will be happy," she added faintly.

John's lips curved mockingly. "And has he spoken of children?"

"No."

"He will never speak of them; he cares for nothing but a selfish life hidden from the whispers of the normal world. Leswing wants no home, Dale, no family — but a refuge from age decorated with glittering things to tempt the foolish side of a young girl's heart. You told me you were at the end of the world and you wanted to find your way back to the beginning. I tried to show you. The beginning of the world is always a bit of a struggle, just as some things about our life together would have been. We are real, Dale, you and I — not in a storybook with the proper incidental music being played at the proper moments. Leswing has created such a storybook for his own edification — and defense. The book will end some day by an abrupt period, and you'll still find yourself at the end of the world. World's End and Paradisio are identical, but you can't see it now." He

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knocked his pipe against the table edge with a studied gesture to conceal the trembling of his brown hand.

Dale was silent.

"Do you love him?" he asked presently.

"I shall marry him."

"You have answered me."

"What will you do with yourself, John?"

"What does it matter — why should you care? Tell me, do you still love me?"

Dale covered her eyes with her hands, the sparkling ring shining in triumph. "I — don't — know," she began confusedly.

"He's stolen in like a well-trained thief; he knew just how to proceed, just what to say and what not to say, and what to give you. He's taken advantage of age — it is n't fair. . . . Well, by God, if he's stolen you from me — I'll — I'll steal some woman some-time!" His voice sank to a whisper.

Dale made a pretense of fastening her coat. "I'm sorry," was all she said.

John looked at her in fierce anger — then his face quivered like an unjustly punished child — and he smiled tenderly.

"Are you, Dale?"

Instinctively she came near him. "I want to kiss you good-by," she said brokenly. "If I am going to another World's End — it is

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fate, the unmatchable. What's the sense of my dragging you along? It would n't be worth the try, John-Giant, to marry me. Just let me stay a dream." She raised her face to his. "Don't you see it is all I can do now? I must marry him because —"

"Because he knows how to make you — because he's a thief! Well, you shall marry him!" The enraged anger of stabbed youth surged to the surface. "You could come here on your knees and beg of me to marry you — in vain. I told you in the first place to be sure — very sure — before you went twisting up someone's destiny. You said you were. I guess all women lie. I guess the things books say of them are true" — he gave her a little push; "I want you to go out of here and stay," he finished. "I'm through! Don't try to make eyes at me and say it's inevitable, and chatter-chitter about World's End and gratitude and this and that — go back to your old man and be dragged off like a slave girl — I don't want you!"

Dale went slowly to the open door. John did not turn to watch her; he was apparently building the fire. She tried to call his name, but she could not seem to make him hear or else no sound came from her lips — she did not know which. He kept on breaking fagots,

THE BARGAIN TRUE

humming in a forcedly gay tone. Finally she went out the door and over to the road. A scarlet car was waiting just beyond the trees. Leswing waving a walking stick came to meet her.

"I took the liberty of coming as near as was proper," he said. "Was the young savage hard to manage?" He had the magical effect of making the whole thing one of unimportance — a disagreeable trifle.

He helped her over a bad place in the road and into the car. She sank back among the cushions while the machine shot ahead. She wondered if John saw.

"Well, my dear, are we to be dumb? I'm afraid the cave man has no sense of humor — a disadvantage of being primitive! Or did he overdo the agonies? He is too young to lose gamely, I fancy. . . . I think we shall have a decent dinner — filet mignon and artichokes, with a sauterne cup. You must tell me what sort of a wedding you will be satisfied with, because I've arranged about the gift of World's End and there is no sense in our staying longer than another day."

"Very well, Philip," Dale turned to him without emotion. It seemed as if the world and all therein were like a Noah's Ark crew moving mechanically about, quite indiffer-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

ent as to whether they were placed on the sunny nursery table or flung from the window into the wet, leaf-ridden curb.

John-Giant did not want her—that one fact remained paramount. He told her so — it was quite wise that she marry Philip. John-Giant's love had been like having a little child who lived but a day.

That night Amherst said "I told you so," and might have added, "We should have been disappointed had it not come to pass." For John Coventry had staggered about the main street in a drunken state as his father had done, and given away his cabin half a dozen times, offered his hand in marriage to the mill girls, and cursed in horrid fashion when someone asked him as to Dale Aldis!

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR SALE: Ten-acre farm in excellent condition; log-cabin house; lumber for addition; two wagons; farm implements — any reasonable offer considered. Owner leaving state reason for selling.

J. COVENTRY, Orchard Lodge.

LESWING read the printed notice in the station and redirected his orders as to driving direct to World's End. Instead the scarlet car halted before the ramshackle justice's office.

Leswing went inside with his jaunty tread, glancing neither to right nor left. In another five minutes or so he was returning, telling the driver to go on to World's End. He turned the collar of his coat round his face, though the wind was not sharp and the car was sheltered. Looking in, all one could see was the figure of an elderly man seemingly in deep meditation.

He discovered Dale packing the trifles she wanted. She was engrossed in a cabinet of keepsakes, scarcely glancing up as he came into the room.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I shan't take any of these," she said in an indifferent voice. "Glenny is going to make a fire and we can burn them ourselves." She threw a faded pink fan on the heap with a discouraged gesture.

"Quite right!" Leswing took off his things. "Are n't you tired poking over that stuff? Let's desist and let Glenny attend the funeral pyre."

"Thanks, I'll see it through. By the way, Glenny is quite broken up. So you intend shipping her to England? She fancied she was to share the romance of Paradisio." If one had heard Dale speaking one would have said she was a cynical woman of the world, master of any situation.

"I can't imagine Glenny in Paradisio — the lions might chew her shawl fringe." Leswing stroked Dale's head. "She'll settle down in London — I'm going to fix her up. She thinks she'll pine for us — but she won't. Time heals anything, Dale, don't forget." He wanted the expression of her narrowing gray eyes.

"I have quite finished," was all she answered, rising and unpinning her apron. "If you will open the door, Philip, we can get these out of the way."

"How long will it take you to pack?"

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"A few hours; there is so little that pleases you — I mean about my clothes. I seem always to be getting new and gorgeous creations and then tossing them aside."

"That is because we can find very few things that are lovely enough." Leswing adjusted his monocle. "We will remedy that by a good Paris shop. Suppose you try to make the right train to-morrow, and I'll follow on by the machine?"

"Very well." Still the same listless interest.

"And if we corral Mrs. Wicks as a necessary evil for a day — may we plan for our wedding on Thursday?" Leswing's eyes were boyish.

"I should think so." Leswing might as well have planned that they inspect a fish aquarium.

"That is all you shall be bothered with — you shall never be bothered at Paradisio. You clap your hands so — as the fairy tales say — and lo, in come two black imps to do your bidding. I never fancied I could endure a conventional existence such as this for so long. Think what you have done, Dale, routed me out of every habit and driven me into being the most ardent lover in the world. . . . Kiss me!" His soft cheek touched hers; she shrank almost imperceptibly.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I don't mind detail — and now I must finish this débris." She slipped by him, the large basket in her hand.

Leswing stood at the mantel, stroking his scarred cheek. Trig whined to be petted, but he did not notice. Glenny tiptoed in to ask about the dinner, but he frowned as he saw her and she tiptoed away. After a little Leswing nodded at the medallion portraits of the dead still standing on the parlor table.

"*Mes amis*," he said softly; "I, too, shall know a great love."

His eyes almost closed as if he recalled some long-forgotten and quite dead memory. His hand trembled as he touched the scar, and for an instant the grizzled head sank down as if he would have prayed!

Then he went in search of Dale, to find she had escaped him and was seeing about the disposal of something else. An old woman in the village needed furniture and Dale had promised she should have a plenty.

Newly appointed trustees of the hospital, bristling with importance, were coming up the walk. They wanted to revel in the possession of the most shameful attraction and speak of moral crucibles and of the infinite good this would do the suffering! It was to be called Amherst Hospital; Dale wished no other name attached to it.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Leswing dismissed them in his inimitable fashion. The trustees found themselves walking down toward the green gate, admitting that the South African diamond king was a man of many moods. After all, Amherst could settle down and tell itself it was a thoroughly respectable settlement — as soon as the new structure rose on the hill top and Dale and Leswing were married and away.

Dale vanished until dinner time. Toinette sternly stood Leswing off when he tried to find her. Toinette would have liked to advise Dale on being less reserved — it seemed to Toinette a very easy thing to love a diamond king; Dale was entirely too distraught to please her idea of the fortunate fiancée.

"I approve that gown, darling," Leswing told her at dinner. "That silver embroidered black gauze makes you like a star — you must wear that at Paradisio."

Dale nodded her thanks. "I think there is nothing more to be decided, is there, Philip?"

"If there is, some one else may have the burden. We've posed for shoulders of Atlas long enough. Dale, have you ever played *jeu de barre* on horseback? I've an Arabian mare in mind for you — and I'll get Marigold, of Vienna, to do your habit."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"You are always talking of clothes and effects and perfect moments of posed pleasure, are n't you, Philip?" Dale leaned on the table characteristically. "What would happen if you lost your money and we had to live in — in a log cabin?"

"If I lost my fortune the sun would neglect to rise," he assured her; "one is as probable as the other. So please stop conjuring up new shadows. I won't lose my fortune — unless the Bank of England fails." He brushed at his grizzled hair impatiently, the Cobra blinking disapproval.

"Philip," she said after a pause, "would you mind if we are not married for another week? Is there a rush about sailing?"

Leswing's brows drew together swiftly. When one nears the completion of a victory straws of delay sound a tocsin of alarm.

"Why, *chérie*?" he managed to say lightly.

"Because I wanted to go to the convent to say good-by."

"Wait until we are married. Let us go together," he urged. "Let us give them something for a remembrance — something they have given up hoping for."

"That would be splendid in you, Philip, but it was not what I had meant. I wanted to stay a few days — alone — I am tired."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Leswing pushed his plate away, debating his answer. Glancing at Dale he noticed that the healthy pallor was deserting her; there was a gray, wishful look.

"Very well," he said briefly; "then we will say in ten days — the marriage?"

"Thank you, Philip." She spoke more happily than he had heard her since they had returned.

Humphrey tiptoed into the dining-room to whisper in Leswing's ear.

"May I be excused, Dale?" Leswing thrust out his lower jaw in indecision. "Something has come up to be seen to."

"Certainly, Philip." Always that monotone, as if he were a stranger with whom she was chancing to dine.

She wondered when she was alone if she was always to feel the same deadish creature. She recalled the June morning when she pushed open the windows of her dressing-room and said, as only youth can say on a June morning, "I'm glad I'm home." Was it the last June — or the last lifetime? This June would see her at Paradisio with the lions sunning on the rocks.

Leswing had entered the drawing-room, to find John standing in the outer doorway as if he begrudged even entrance into the room.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I came to tell you you can't tip me — like a waiter," he said swiftly. "I'm not to be bought off — like your blacks."

"I beg pardon?" Leswing began in a hushed tone, lest Dale hear and recognize the speakers.

"You thought you were too smart to ever be caught, did n't you?" John's face, with the trace of his night's revel, was unpleasant to look upon. "Thought I'd stop whining if you got some one 'from New York' to buy my place for twice its worth — that I'd never know — count myself lucky, go away to find a cheap woman who would be my equal. Why the devil did you bother? I would have more respect for you if you had n't —"

"I am sorry you misunderstand." Leswing came closer, still speaking softly. "I wanted to give you a start —"

"A start!" He laughed shrilly, like an angered woman. "You've given me a push — you take your young girl and drag her off to Africa to gloat over her, you old man! Never mind about me! A lot I'll care after — a little. I'll make my pile like you've done, and when I'm old and clever and able to buy souls as easily as I buy shoes now I'll buy some boy's sweetheart and take her off — and pay back what you've done to me."

Leswing's face turned white. "John," he

THE BARGAIN TRUE

said softly. "John — let me talk to you. But how can I?" he asked of himself. "How can I?"

"Don't talk to me — we're not in Africa, where you could have me spirited off if I displeased your majesty. We're in a country where a man says as he thinks — and does pretty much, too. Don't you suppose you've stolen Dale — as if you held me up at night and took my purse? You knew how — did n't you? You had a long apprenticeship. Well, if clean living makes a man a dupe for such as you — I'm done with it. I'll learn how to steal the youngest girl I fancy — when I'm nearly fifty."

Leswing put his hands to his face.

"If you had lived the way men should live you'd have married and had your family — you would n't have conjured up some wild existence beyond civilization where you could live with the morals of a Bushman. You're afraid of civilization, Leswing — because civilization defines the boundaries for old age. You know what happens to old men who can't buy loyalty — hired lackeys. You've got Dale, haven't you? You think her youth will hold your age at bay? It won't. But you can have her — I don't want her. I would n't take her if she asked — only don't



“You can have her—I don’t want her”

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THE BARGAIN TRUE

try sneak tricks buying off my land at a bonus and then telling Dale I took a bribe. I'm no peasant, Leswing — I'm an American farmer."

"If you were my son I'd be proud —" Leswing mumbled vaguely.

"Stop!" John-Giant cried out suddenly, an overwhelming anger taking possession of him. "I want no cheap phrases — from either of you! Why did n't you let me alone — or why did n't you tell me what you intended to do? I'm not the country boor who would have patted himself complacently and said he could win against such as you. . . . I know your sort . . . I told her so," he came nearer, his eyes dark, threatening things and his face violent with color.

Leswing retreated towards the mantel.

John-Giant laughed. "Are you afraid of me?" he paused.

"No — sorry — and a trifle ashamed," the older man answered. "I can never hope to make you understand — I don't know that I understand, myself. When you are my age — perhaps you will — just now life itself is a mighty barrier between us. And when a man reaches my age and has my wealth and has wasted his life, in a sense — he is not just one man, but a composite creature — to be pitied!

THE BARGAIN TRUE

A coward one moment, a swaggering hero the next, a student another day, a neurotic now and then, and sometimes, during a great crisis, — an ascetic. You hate me — and I admire you for it. I don't know why I tried to buy your place, it was not altogether the idea of tipping, as you accuse — it was partly that — and partly because I wanted to give you a chance to find yourself and we must have money to enable us to do so."

"As well throw a man down a cave at — at Panama Rocks — and halloo after him, 'You can stay there for eternity but here is a good edition of a popular novel and a sandwich to make it easy,' — oh, you battered, bad men of the world that want to cheat — cheat — cheat," and John's strong fist doubled unconsciously as he came nearer. "One time I wondered if you would be game — as game as you insist on your hunting dogs being before you take them out — if you would stand by and see that a bargain was 'true' as the old country saying goes. . . . I half-way fancied you were. You were game the time I saved your life," he said the words with telling emphasis, "and I took it as a signal that you would be game in bigger things than a physical disaster. . . . Well, is n't that as smart sounding as even you could say it —

THE BARGAIN TRUE

is n't it — is n't it?" His face was terrible and pitiful to look upon, filled with awful lines of hate and dying, groaning ideals and strong, wild manhood, that terrible noontime of youth when desires and actions are liable to run amuck.

Leswing put his white, well-cared-for hands, with their sparkling Cobra, before his face. He knew so well what he should see unless he shielded it. John-Giant thought he was warding a mere blow — and he laughed.

"I won't strike you — you're too old," he said brutally.

The white hands with their sparkling ring dropped at Leswing's side. "It is n't a blow, my boy — not of the body — I can't make it clear to any of you."

"There was a meaning when you lost yourself in that cave," John-Giant continued, hardly pausing for him to finish. "It was an Indian punishment cave where they took rotters and walled them up alive . . . and a good idea at that. . . . I found a skeleton there . . . then I found you. . . . I saved you."

Leswing gave a hoarse cry. "Merciful God!" He held out his hands to the boy.

"Have I made you feel like that?"

"Thief, thief, thief!" cried the boy, and with

THE BARGAIN TRUE

a wild, uncontrollable impulse he seized Leswing and they began to grapple, the furniture falling with crashes as Leswing was dragged into the center of the room, helpless in John-Giant's grasp — and trying to call out something and thinking all in a dizzy second of repentance and anguish and almost terror that the rest of his life he would be haunted by this boy — no silent, pale ghost with moonstone eyes slipping about at dusk but a strong, stabbed youth with an ugly twist to his features and the accusing eyes of an injured soul — John-Giant saying as only injured youth can say, "Thief — thief — thief! — You flinched at a bargain true!"

He felt his hands at his throat — and they felt good, he was eager to have pain inflicted — it was the first time anyone had physically caused him suffering, and the mental anguish which he had tried to deny and stupefy rejoiced at a physical outlet and complement. It was the lacking and essential element to psychically release strange powers of good and self-sacrifice as seasoned firewood may lie forever useless unless one creates a flame by which it may ignite.

He knew his head struck a jagged corner and that John-Giant kept saying in a thick, low tone, "thief, thief, thief" — and suddenly

THE BARGAIN TRUE

he was let go and he staggered, dizzy and weak — a queer, battered man — and looking up he saw that John-Giant was taking up his hat.

He did not understand what had happened. He steadied himself against a tall chair. Then he glanced around.

Dale had opened the door. She stood like a carved figurine, her eyes cool, shining slits of gray.

“Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Leswing,” said John in stilted fashion. It is not normal for youth to be tragic, and therefore when tragedy is forced upon them they meet it in a ridiculous-pathetic fashion.

Turning he left the house.

CHAPTER XIX

DALE came into the room. "Philip, what have you done?"

"Did you hear?"

She nodded.

"I tried to get some one to buy the little place — I wanted to give him a start. But they must have told."

"Of course they told — all Amherst loves John."

Leswing moved uneasily about the room. "I was in error."

"What will become of him?" asked Dale suddenly. Then she gave a frightened cry: "Philip, we've ruined him between us! With all this muddle of everything — he's going down hill instead of up. It is n't fair to do that to any — young — thing. He will never believe in anyone again. That is very terrible — is n't it?"

"He'll get over it." Leswing's voice was metallic. "I did."

"You?" Dale looked in silent interrogation.

"Well," said Leswing hoarsely, "I seem to have fozzled all the way round."

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"What did you get over? What happened to you when you were young that made you the bad man of Africa?"

He glanced at her through his heavy eyebrows; curious lines crept into his face as if age were suddenly springing from nowhere to claim him despite his efforts.

"What happened?" she repeated.

"Why should you care? You — who don't give a damn for me!" He put his hands up to his head. Dale saw that even their well-kept appearance betrayed little pouches about the joints and a withered symptom at the tips.

"I do give a damn for you," she told him in the same low tone; "only you forget that mentally I am no longer young. It is not time but happenings which govern the hour-glass. I am old enough to be told what happened."

He looked at her for a long moment. "I must have seemed quite a q-queer bad man," he said finally; "sort of combination genie bringing forth rare jewels and incense, and a whining slacker afraid to admit that the time for skullcaps and after-dinner naps has come. Come here, Dale, let me see you closely! There, what a tired child it is — for it is a child even if it tries to be grown up." He laughed — a hollow sound like some one try-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

ing to bring harmony from tinkling cymbals. "I'm in the same class as the people who rush their three-year old infants into typewriting and reading Greek. You shall be a child again. I've been quite impossible." He laughed again.

Dale shivered. He seemed driftwood; the debonair man of the world, slightly insolent and expecting universal homage, had vanished. Leswing remained, the Leswing of bruised youth who "got over it." At that moment she felt more in love with him than ever before.

"What happened?" she kept repeating. "Tell me — was it something such as happened to John — tell me — for if it was you did not get over it."

"Do you care so much what has happened to John?" He reached forward and took her face between his palms. They were cold, almost feeble; and she would have rather that he let her alone.

"I care so much," she told him. "All the young in me cares, Philip. I've so little to give you — have you never thought of it? My very self is John's — even if he no longer wishes it that way!"

"Do you dread Paradisio?" he whispered.

Her eyes narrowed. "What happened to you?" she continued.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"I see!" Leswing released her, dropping back into his chair. "I'm afraid I made a bad mess of it — forty ways round the jack," he murmured.

Dale stood up before him. "If I were your daughter and two such men as Philip Leswing, diamond king, and John Coventry, farmer, asked for my hand, what would you honestly say?"

"Dale —" he began in protest.

"If I were your child, Philip — can you never think of me as that? Not even for an instant? What then? Would you send me to Paradisio — to another World's End?"

He moved uneasily in his chair. "So!" was all he answered.

"If John Coventry were your son —"

"I can't go on!" Leswing sprang to his feet. "I'm an old man, Dale. There, you're well rid of me!"

He went to the mantelpiece and buried the grizzled head in his arms. She waited in silence. Presently he faced her.

"When I was a boy, Dale — to be exact, on the ship going back to London after I brought Mirza here — I fell in love, just as John-Giant has fallen. She was a young girl such as you — and she cared for me — as you care for John-Giant. We were amiable

THE BARGAIN TRUE

babes in the wood — she the youngest daughter of an exceedingly aristocratic but poor Russian noble, I, the youngest son of a properly born and fairly wealthy English family. . . . There was a duke of her own country, quite a bad man such as I have become. He was over twice her age, with a record not belonging to a young girl's diary. She had come to loathe him. We were planning to be married and begin the usual dovecot existence — I should be able to buy her decent bonnets and still keep my riding horses. We could even winter on the Riviera in a modest way, and Mirza should not be neglected. You see, I was not the diamond king then — nor a bad man. There was nothing unusual about it, Dale; the ordinary, fragrant boy-and-girl affair — just as yours and John-Giant's has been. But she had an annoying family — the b-brothers kept getting into card games and gambling off a bit of the estate — that sort of thing; then political influence was brought to bear on her father. Of course I was n't up to providing for that sort of emergencies. In an amazingly short time she sent word she was to be a duchess and she hoped I would forget.

“I remember I made a great night of it. The conditions were a bit different from John-

THE BARGAIN TRUE

Giant's but the impulses the same. I delivered a socialistic speech from the bar-room table and kissed the maids at intervals — and went home to burn up our letters and the cravats she had made, and send back her keepsakes — all the bleeding trifles. Then I thought I would go to the devil, but being a fastidious youth the devil seemed unattractive. I planned to enter a Trappist monastery — but that, too, wore away in time. . . . I even went to her wedding uninvited and watched her as she pledged her youth to a world's end. She only lived a few years — I fancy she never quite forgot.

“Then I disappeared into the heart of the African jungle — and let the gossips say what they wished. I made up my mind to love no woman seriously until I, too, was middle-aged and rich and incombatable and no young man could override my inducements. I believed it was the way of the world. I, who had been crucified as a youthful lover in deadly earnest with ideals as an incentive would be victorious as a middle-aged husband with money to jingle before the lovely young thing's nose. But I have been wrong.

“John-Giant hates me, Dale; but he will never know how hard it was to stab him, to keep back memories of myself similarly

THE BARGAIN TRUE

stabbed! After all, Dale, it has not been you who have made me change — but John-Giant. I wish to God he might have been my son. This custom of civilization's unequalizing age in marriage is a sad fault which must be overcome. This marrying of girls to oldish men who want to hide behind the sweet flesh of youth — is quite a coward's tactics! I'm afraid I've made you very unhappy, Dale. Can you forgive me?"

"Philip!" she put her arms round him tenderly.

"You see I am not all bad man, am I?" he asked almost gayly. "How well I can argue on the other side of the question — once started! Don't be afraid, Dale — I shall give you back to your John-Giant. I could never marry you. I had tried telling myself that you did not care for John-Giant, that it was a girl's dreamy vision. I see that it is the sacred white love of youth, which all the world should reverence — and so I give you back. Nor shall I spoil the romance by trying to heap worldly things as a penance. As I have refused to glorify age and be honest with my hourglass, so shall I try to leave youth unspoiled for both of you. Youth means struggle, Dale. I shall not try to make it easier — much easier," he could not help adding.

THE BARGAIN TRUE

"Later, when Paradisio has lost its master, do not refuse what shall come to — not you but John-Giant! For you will have learned the rugged beauty of work, and riches shall not spoil you." He kissed her on the forehead.

"Will you go back alone?"

A shadow seemed to settle in his eyes. "I shall become acquainted with old age — and I shall not be lonesome. I shall learn how to be an old man, Dale — that will keep me busy. You said a true thing when you told me Paradisio was but another world's end. World's End was not lightly named, my dear; it was not merely a romantic villa but a semilimbo filled with those who have tried tricking Father Time! There are many such world's ends. Time lets the mask proceed a bit and then sentences us to world's end. It was n't quite cricket of Aldis, Dale, to take from Mirza the joy of living. Youth must be with youth, the same as roses belong to June. The beauty of first love is something almost spiritual; later loves speak of material things. Strange as John-Giant may think it, it is better for him that I give you up than for your own self. In time he would grow into such a sardonic, careless man as I and steal from some other boy. I am going to world's end, Dale. I shall never try again to be young; I

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missed my chance at it — more's the pity. Tell John he must be very, very good to you."

Slowly Dale drew off the sparkling ring. Leswing accepted it without comment.

"Time is not such a harsh parent if you treat him as he deserves." He stroked her hair as he had done those first days at World's End. "But we who have cheated must expect world's end!"

"What has made you give me up?" she whispered.

"No great crisis or unexpected dénouement — merely that Truth, a great ally of Time, lent his arguments to the quiver of your lips when you tried to kiss me, and to the wild despair in John-Giant's eyes. . . . That was enough. John-Giant does not feel the quiver of hesitation when you kiss him, does he?" Leswing seemed impersonal in his questioning.

She shook her head.

"This is quite the end. All the Paradisio and jewels in the world with the sea booming at one's feet and a cloth-of-gold frock for each hour in the day — all that, Dale, is like a withered leaf in the scale pan against the unwilling quiver of your lips. I have been blind — what is it you Americans say? — I-lost my step." He turned, pacing up and down the room.

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"We shall stay in Amherst," Dale said presently; "where John has worked so hard and won so little. It would not be fair to ask him to go away."

"Quite unfair," he assured her even cheerfully. "Become one of Amherst. I dare say it can be as beautiful as Paradisio if one looks through love's projectoscope. Make Amherst know the real Dale, even if it did refuse to come to your first party. Make your life in accord with the life about you, and when you grow old you will have comrades instead of black imps of lonely despair. A stabbed youth, I tried to become different from everyone else in the world. I told myself that whenever I chose I could gather youth, too, into my treasure chest. I am quite alone, Dale, except for hirelings. Don't, I beg of you, repeat the mistake."

"I am not afraid of Amherst or work or age — if John is with me," she said.

"Even if you come to a forked road — you and this John-Giant — and in after years each take your own ways you will have started normally, as youth should start; and you can by that very beginning have the wisdom and the honor which shall make the parting sane — not like an oldish man's vague dreams of Paradisio."

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"Ah, but we could not part," Dale almost whispered. "There would be the children —"

Leswing was silent.

"But I have learned from you, Philip. Not even John shall know all I have learned." She kissed him gently. Then her eyes gravened. "He said he did not want me —"

Leswing smiled. "So I said — one time — but had she come back, Dale, ah — ask this John-Giant. I will vouch for his answer."

"I want to go to him now!" Dale was unconscious almost of the tragedy before her. It was John-Giant she must reach and kneel before and beg of, John-Giant who would take her fast in his strong young arms and tell her the things which only John-Giant could murmur in loverish fashion.

"May I drive you up there?" he asked.

"Just to the last turn of the road." She glanced at the clock. It was after nine.

"I shall not wait this time to bring you back — for you belong to John. He shall bring you back when he chooses."

They drove in silence to the forked road. Then Dale slipped out of the car, Leswing grasping her hand gently and telling her to be careful of a jagged root he could just spy over by the turn. There was something infinitely patient and benedictory in his voice though he spoke merely of a jagged root.

CHAPTER XX

TURNING, Dale fled, and the wondering chauffeur drove the scarlet car with its single passenger back to World's End.

The cabin was lighted. Sobered and ashamed — and slightly bitter — John had set to work at his lessons. She could see him bending over the round table with its mannish litter of books.

Dale rapped. When he opened the door she drew back; it seemed as if she could not tell him he had said so positively that he was through. But Leswing said it was the way of stabbed youth and that he would vouch for his answer.

"What now?" he said harshly. "I shan't sell your love letters to a magazine!"

"I want to come back to you," she began; then she stretched out her hands, but he did not respond. "Please, may I come in?"

Almost unwillingly he let her pass inside. "I love you John-Giant. Will you marry me? Please, will you marry me?" Her face blurred suddenly because of its closeness to his own. "Mr. Leswing sent me to you; he is sailing back alone. It is a long thing to explain and

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I am tired — a little later, John, I will tell you. He sent me here and said we were to marry and work together.” The dusky head dropped onto his shoulder. “John-Giant, I love you — please, I love you —”

Slowly the strong arms encircled her. “When?” he asked, wondering if this, too, was a mirage.

“Now!” she answered impulsively. “Now, now!” She stamped her little foot. “We won’t go away from Amherst, John — we won’t sell the cabin — we’ll build the addition. We’ll stay, and Amherst shall have World’s End for a hospital; and perhaps — it will come to my next party. John, kiss me — please.”

Slowly their lips met.

“He said,” Dale told him a moment later, “he left you to bring me back because I belonged to you — John-Giant.”

Convinced that neither John Coventry nor Dale Aldis was unduly influenced or in a delirium, the justice was prevailed upon to marry them, his nightcap atilt and his blood pressure running amuck, while his wife and daughter served as curious witnesses. The flickering lamplight showed Dale’s eyes shining like stars while John-Giant towered above her saying, “I, John, take thee, Dale —”

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They went back to the cabin to talk until the stars gave way to pinky dawn. They talked of Leswing, as if he were a kindly friend long since dead; of Mirza; and of Amherst, with its beauty and ugliness alike; of John's future; of the big house with its white pillars and curtains draped at the shining diamond-paned windows; and then of love — as only unstained youth dares speak!

When they reached World's End, Glenny, red-eyed and tremulous of voice, told her lamb that Leswing had left. He had gathered his bags that same night. But there was a small package for Mrs. John Coventry.

The accompanying note was characteristically flippant:

"Madame Coventry: As the Russians say, God bless you and may your husband be raised to the rank of a general! Forgive my hasty leave but I should be *de trop*. Besides I must cancel the orders for frocks and frills.

"Even Glenny is convinced that all ends well. I gamble she will come to smile upon John-Giant as she does upon her lamb. I hereby bequeath Glenny to you both; first, because she can be of service, and last, because she would not be happy elsewhere. Neither Paradisio nor a Lunnon shop would compensate her for the loss of one Dale Aldis Coventry. She is fully reimbursed for the future — that is my wedding gift. And be not surprised or angered at any trifles she may present from time to time. It is not I but Glenny who

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presents them. Don't scold, Dale and John-Giant, for I cannot think of Dale without a smoky gray frock or John minus a bit of help toward the cattle venture! Besides — Glenny wishes to give it.

"Meantime, do take away your bags and boxes from World's End; you can be quite larky when you are done fixing up the cabin. Promise me, Dale, that the ermine blanket will hang over your bed and the Brittany needlework shield the windows.

"Of your future I have no fear — but you will write me? Coventry *mari* could not be such an ogre. I kiss your little hands — and when the sea booms extra loud and the lions lie sunning on the rocks under the windows of the St. Ursula room, may I envy John-Giant?"

"PHILIP."

Inside the flat case lay Leswing's religion — the cloud sprite.

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